

Table 11: (APPENDIX III)

Functional Calendar of Seasons and Human Activities among the Highland-Plateau Amhara

Months Abyssinian Calendar (Julian) in Amhara	Months Equivalent in Western (Gregorian) Calendar	Climatic Seasons on Abyssinian High-Plateau	Annual Cycle of Amhara Ecological Activities (Economics, Agriculture, etc.)	Annual Cycle of Religious Seasons and Activities among Coptic-Abyssinian Amhara.	Cycle of Amhara Social Events	Syn- cre- tion	Nov. Ethiopian Civic Events on National Calendar
Miskram 1	Sept. 11	receding flood after rainy season; yellow "misqil" daisy carpets land; spring ("teadaya").	place beehive basket- work in trees (swarm- ing season); pasture is in flower; plowing now or fallow field for later cultivation, while soil is still fairly soft ("gat").	17th Miskram: Feast of the (true) Cross ("Yämäs- qäl Häl") - public re- joicing around bonfire (dämära). Minor: 1st Miskram is St. John's Day. 11th: "Arafa" - (Remembrance of Adam and Eve)	kin visiting when paths pass- able; children bring New Year flower bouquets ("amqutash") on and after 1st (St. John's Day); and receive promise of new clothes for Misqäl.		"Misqäl" is now also a national holiday; Emperor ap- pears at bonfire (Sept. 27th).
Miskram 30	Oct. 10						
Taqest 1	Oct. 11	suney growing & ripening season (alämmäl sega).	Remove honey from hive. Harvest first barley ("goba"), thresh and winnow it for roasting or beer-making ("tälla"); sell honey to make mead ("täl"); children guard harvest against birds and baboons.	12th Taqest: St. Michael's Feast "Mikaal"; services followed by picnics in countryside. Local: 3th pilgrimage to "tebel" holy wells and waterfalls of Gämrä Märfä Gaidas (Abe).	outdoor games of children; boys make bullroarers ("gur- muremeh") to frighten birds away, shoot pebbles at baboons from slingshots. Girls dance rounds and greet storks arriving "from Jerusalem".		Annual com- memoration of Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie, Nov 2nd. (Taqest 3rd).
Taqest 30	Nov. 9						

[xlv]

574
857
517527
796
805
132
221

[xlv]

527
796
805
132
24

526
547
651

Redar 1	Nov. 10	ripening of later cereal grains; sunny, occasional heavy mists.	harvest of cereal grains, esp. early "joff" for bread; "big" and "baba" cider. Totemwork in harvest and but construction; boys take cattle from sun-scorched upland to green valleys.	12th Redar "Mikael" Feast, with plencia, in other localities. Minor 6th "Qasqum" clergy ends 40-day fast. Local: Hot "Hem" Festival at Aksum; Hem's holiday.	Flirting season (esp. of adoles- cents) begins on "Mikael's" Fresh bake, beautifi- cation; tattooing (esp. adult dis- eased women). Hot: Church stu- dent holiday.	
Redar 30	Dec. 9					
Tahaa 1	Dec. 10	Summer ("mug"), hot, sunny, oc- casional light rains. Red aloes on rocks and thorny plant-irrigated fields. dominate moun- tain landscape. Rivers become brooks, brooks go dry.	Peasants take "joff" etc. to market in towns. Seeding of "summer barley" on Trade's organic canevine produce and hides for salt and imports, coffee etc., cattle pas- tured in valleys.	19th Tahaa: "Gabriel" Feast (because he came to Mary announcing Jesus' coming), esp. at Guleld near Bira Bura. 20th Tahaa: Christmas ("Lodit", or "Gina"), with all-night church services and special chants.	19th-20th is tradi- tional honey ("Gina") season, with clients on Christmas. Judges begin riding their circuit to hear litigation. (land tenure, damages, etc.).	19th: Sup- pale Selesel travels to Guleld (for "Gabriel"). 20th: Emperor receives students, in traditional tegs and Jodphura.
Tahaa 30	Jan. 9					
Jan 1	Jan. 9	Height of dry summer season. Tan- gish rivers considered poisonous for cattle.	Harvest irrigated garden crops: peas (chubera), plant (gula) (cabbage). Full produce for taxes, and to buy salt, hot peppers, coffee.	Holy month: 11th Jan is "Tangit" (Epiphany), hol- iest day of year pro- cessions to specially erected pool, with maced "tabet" (tablet), kiss- ing of water for the coming light rains. 6th: "Gara" (Circumcision of Jesus). 18th: "Gargia" (St. George) Hot: "Kallaya Maryem" (Mary)	Tangit: Herero collect for gov- ernment for land- lord, rent and gifts for the church. On the 11th (Epiphany), young men perform horse tourna- ment ("gaga") wo- men are colfied- ed, home-rud- ered palms. Cili- men of flirting.	secondary: On Epiphany, Jan. 19th Pentecost (11th Jan), ("Marru") among Emperor H.K. Palachao receives foreign harvest diplomats in fest. 12th traditional morning custom.
Jan 30	Feb. 7					

[xlvii]

Yekatit 1	Feb. 8	dry; east wind brings puffy clouds (and hungry locusts) some ripening of wild fruits.	late barley("adja gaba") matures on irrigated fields and is harvested; price of sheep and other meat doubles (due to heavy meat-eating just before Lenten season) 11th-20th ("abed ama").	Lenten Fast "rudada" (lit. suffering) begins after the 22nd, for 59 days though called "arba tse" (Fast of 40). 9th-10th is 3-day Fast of Miniwah ("Tsemt Miniwah"). 16th is feast "Kedana Nebelat".	Housewives during the long Lent must show skill with vegetable dishes and spices, (even butter and milk are not allowed). Happy dawning on 16th; Jews promised to come.	eve of 22nd: annual convention of "aar" spirit doctors.	On 12th(Feb. 19th) memorial services for Greatful massacre 1937 On 23rd(Mar. 2nd) Adda Victory(1894) celebrated.
to	to						
Yekatit 30	Mar. 9						
Mäskäl 1	Mar. 10	dry; burning of bush to keep locusts away, and new fields (also-and-burn).	cultivated fruit(peach) ripens; garden crops are harvested for Lent food; commercial caravans hurry to complete tours before rains; cattle is pastured far into bush.	Minor, bourgeois of Lent: 5th "Abo-Gabra Minifä Gedda" worship and dance on St. Zaywala. 19th "Debrä Zayt" commemorating Mount of Olives feast in Jerusalem 27th "Medhane Aläh" -(Savior)	Youngsters pasturing cattle in far bush have liberty for games and boxing, hut-building, etc. No weddings in Lent.		
to	to						
Mäskäl 30	April 8						
Miyarya 1	April 9	light rains begin, Autumn ("bägn"). As soon as soil softens, plowings begin.	refreshed by drizzles, peasants trade for new iron plowpoints and prepare soil, esp. after Lent. Prices of meat, even grain and pepper double for Easter feasting, as buyers travel far from towns. No work during Passion week("pamnat") before Easter.	Severe fast during last 3 days of Lent, "seqlä" Good Friday on the 15th. All-night services eve of the 17th, Fasakha(Easter) wearing green reads on forehead("qetäma") given by priests Sat. morning. Resurrection("tehañt") announced 6 A.M. Sunday, meat-feast begins.	Second big wedding season. from Easter to heavy rains, so unwedded girls wash clothes, redded palms, watch young men at javelin throwing and ball ("qomphat") games.	17th: Fasakha (on Easter) celebration of return of Salassie in May 1942, ("mamläsa") entry into Addis Ababa	27th:(May 5th): Annual commemoration of restoration of Haile Selassie in May 1941, ("mamläsa") entry into Addis Ababa
to	to						
Miyarya 30	May 8						

[526
587]

527
796
805
132
221

[517]

527
796
905
132
221

Garbet 1	May 9	light rains; spots of fresh, green grass (for pasturage nearer home). Storks fly northward.	Women prepare fuel for rainy season: dead-wood; piles of sun-dried cowdung, coated with layer of mud. Caravans hurry home from Sudan, etc. Fish "sams" caught in rivers.	1st: Ladaia (Birthday of Virgin Mary): After services, last, large, outdoor picnic, under "dass" shelter 24th: "Tukla Haymanot" day, pilgrimage to his holy well at Habra Libenos. Children sing of country's well-being to storks.	1st: Men and women celebrate outdoor picnics separately, but young folk meet while older ones feast on meat and barley beer.
Garbet 30	June 7				
Says 1	June 8	Heavy rains, winter "Korsh" begins: fogs, storms, cold rains. Fishing season. Children are taught to swim before rivers are dangerous.	Intensive plowing of softened soil, seeding by broadcasting: barley, then tyeff, wheat. Beans and other garden crops are seeded and fenced. Fish is plentiful and cheap.	9th: Resurrection of Wednesday and Friday "Fast of the Salvation" recessed since Easter. Clergy: "Farqilto" 6th (fast); 7th "Isom hawaryat" - 1 month Fast of Apostles.	Master gives feast to retainers for plowing, "erf mjay", with fried fish, beer, "amari" music, and "betu" dance. Mutual aid in hut repair.
Says 30	July 7				
Naal 1	July 8	Heavy monsoon rains, sometimes tornadoes. sheets of rain almost daily. Cold	Indoor work; some minor hut repairs.	Intensive church school for boys, who are not needed at this season for any other work. Clergy: 3th: Fast of Peter and Paul ends month Fast of Apostles.	Standstill (e.g. of visiting) due to swollen brooks and washed-out paths.
Naal 30	August 6				16th (July 23) Birthday ("Lodit") of Emp. Haile Selassie; praise hymns changed in churches.

[xlviil]

527
796
205
132
221

1526
276

Abasē 1	August 7	Heavy rains; fishing easy in muddy, turbulent rivers.	Some sow a bit of "yiff" and "adja" barley, to have it late in harvest. Cattle taken to upland.	7th: Trinity ("Balasaye"); 13th: mock battles with whips ("jara") fought by young men in afternoon, between households and individuals. Younger children hadger adults for gifts in morning.	7th: Pictures of Emp. H.S. carried in parade, because Trinity is his name; flags, etc.
Abasē 30	Sept. 3				
Pagumel	Sept. 6	Rains broken by occasional sunshine.	End of tradit. fiscal year: "Wigedras" had to account to the feudal lord for dues he had collected from merchants.	3rd: Feast of St. Raphael, the water saint, bathing in his holy water. 5th: Eve of feast of St. John: bury "lafaf" "odeq", sorrell; baths.	3rd: Examination of boys in church school to decide who will be deacons; so some use drugs as stimulant. Younger children collect peas for good harvest in new year.
2	7				
3	8				
4	9				
5	10				

283 thread onto a warping reel in rough basket shape and size,
462 called "mäzäwä". It is a kneehigh frame of branches set
on the ground, with a somewhat narrower waist. Several skeins of cotton thread are thus connected and rolled into long, firm strands to serve as warp.

Sometimes it takes several months for a housewife to prepare enough cotton thread for the warp and woof of a single toga ("shamma"). But a diligent woman, if she has little else to do, can prepare enough for half a dozen or more togas a year. The cotton thread is now given to the male weaver "shamani" who is to weave the toga. He may set up his loom in the back yard of the customer, or work near his own hut.

462 Skilled occupations for single women, e.g. "women between marriages" who often go to urban centers, are few. The brewer of mead and owner of the "tej byēt", described under entertainment, usually employs several women as waitress-prostitutes.

462 There is another occupation, the woman beautician.
305 She may be specialized as a tattooer of women, "täqwari",
304 usually a Coptic Amhara woman, who is kept busy especially
• [796] before great church holy days such as the Feast of the True Cross ("Mäsqäl"), Christmas ("Gänna") and Epiphany ("Temqät"). Her customers are more often divorcees "between marriages" (who can afford it because of earnings as restaurateur-prostitutes or beer and mead brewers), than young girls or married women, who have no cash. As the name indicates ("tequrat" means blackening), one of her jobs is to darken the gums between the teeth, to heighten

A. The Structure of Church Organization.

346
778

a) The Church buildings and design.

The traditional church building is round, designed on a pattern of three concentric circles. This combines the round pattern of the African hut, though much larger in this case, with the functional design of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Like the latter, each church has a Holy of Holies ("geddesta geddusan"), a closed inner sanctum, which may be entered only by upper priesthood or the day's officiating priest. He carries burning and smoking incense in a metal or clay canser, while he marches around the sacred wooden tablet, the "tabot", located there. On the tabot, which may not be seen by layman's eyes, are inscribed, in Geez, the name of the saint to whom the particular (parish) church is dedicated, plus magical names of angels and geometric symbolism and phrases from both the Old and New Testament. The "tabot" represents symbolically the Ark of Moses kept by the ancient Israelites in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem

346

[783]

The second circumference, the "māqdās", can be seen from the outside through several doorless openings. Here the priests perform the eucharist, hidden from the public gaze by portable white linen screens. The "maqdas" is restricted only during services.

• 796
346

Within the third, walled-in circumference, the "tazā", called also "gēne mahlēt" (lit. reciting-place of devotional poetry), the chorister-scribes ("dābtāra") congregate while they chant devotional poetry and other

796 liturgy, swaying and dancing to the rythm of their raised
346 voices, the beat of huge drums, and the tinkling of sistra.

Laymen may also occupy sections within this third enclosure, mostly near the northern end. There is no seating. Standing is required during the long services that begin just before dawn and last many hours. Therefore, priests and chanters lean on "maqomya", strong bamboo crutches equipped with iron or even silver concave tops. These are also used as they sway with the rythm when the dancing is in progress. These crutches may be privately owned; but many churches own simpler ones as church utensils. When important visitors, "great men" and their guests attend, without maqomyas of their own, the chief priest usually takes those owned or used by the lesser priests to supply the Very Important Persons, to the barely disguised displeasure of the regular users.

346
562 Women are not nadmitted even into this third outer enclosure. They must remain outside the church building, in the yard, or leaning against the hard-mud wall, or, at a more pretentious church, under the outer colonade of wooden posts which support the overhanging edge of the roof. The roof, usually thatched, but of imported corrugated iron in better urban churches, is usually ornamented with an iron cross adorned with wooden or metal ostrich eggs. (This custom may be of older, African, origin.)

778 Geez). Here the bread and wine used in the eucharist are
346 prepared and stored with great secrecy. The utensils of
251 the nearby cooking hut, the baking pan "metad" and large
clay jars for barley beer, are also stored here. Supplies
of tyeff, barley, wheat, beans, peas, may also be stored.

779 In recent years, church parades feature prominent-
186 ly the flag of the nation, the red-green-yellow of the
central government, emphasising in modern ways the close
union of church and state that has long been traditional
in Abyssinia.

(e) Worship and Devotional Poetry.

593 The musical chants and notations studies formally
796 have already been outlined in connection with church edu-
cation.

Church hymns, including devotional poetry, are
called "qane" in a generic rather than specifically ac-
curate sense. A collection of them is contained in the
book "gubae qana", and they are sung in a special mode.
The chief mode is called "selt". It has three variations:

- (1) "geez" - short tones, dedicated to the "Father";
- (2) "ezel" - mournful tones in minor key, dedicated
to the "Son" 's passion;
- (3) "araray" - long, drawn-out tones, dedicated
to the "Holy Ghost".

These variations are interlaced, for special re-
sults, and for specific occasions. The mass, "qedde"
(lit. sanctification) is chanted in a mode bearing the

533 same name. "Saatat", the midnight chant, has a special
796 mode. "Dawit", the Psalms of David, are chanted in their
characteristic mode, as is the "Addis Kidan" (New Testa-
ment).

On other occasions, not only does the musical
composer have the opportunity to improvise, but the ly-
rical poetry, "qenē", can be varied. In rural districts,
priests who can only recite Geez but not compose in it,
because they don't understand it, even compose "qenē" in
Amharic. For example:

[539]

"How are you, earth? How are you, world?

Even though I love you (my home soil), I wish not
to come.

Even if I hated you--how shall I stay away?"

This poem, chanted as part of a church service,
is not strictly liturgical, varies from district to dis-
trict, and can express a wide variety of philosophical
emotions, including the Weltschmerz motive illustrated
here. The peasants appreciate this unofficial, Amharic
addition to Geez liturgy, and often mutter under their
breath "Aiyee! what good words!".

(f) Heretical Movements.

795

Like any old church, the Abyssinian Coptic church
has had heretical movements within it, but none of them
have ever been able to split the church into sharply
divided sects. Instead, heretical sects seem to follow

805 Gregorian, so that, prior to September 11th, the Western 1956 A.D. corresponds to the Abyssinian 1948 A.M., "amä-tä mehrät" (year of grace). The same year is regarded by the Abyssinian church as 7448 "amäta aläm" (year of Creation); and 1672 "senaätat amät" (era of martyrs). There is a 4-year cycle of apostles, so that 1954 A.D. (1946 A.M.) was the year of Lark, "zämmänä marqos wänge-läwi".

796 In the annual cycle of religious events, the dates
805 of each holy day are further commemorated by monthly repetition of a shadow-like minor holyday. Christmas is commemorated every month on the 29th, because it falls on the 29th day of the month of Täsas. This reminder is utilized also in everyday layman's temporal affairs, and the agreement to meet is expressed by individuals as "I shall meet you on Taklä Haymanot", since everyone knows this means the 24th day of the month. The following religious dates are commonly utilized by the laymen for secular purposes:

Table 8: Dates of the Religious Calendar Utilized for Secular Purposes.

796 805 176	1st day of the month - "Ledäta", birthday of the Virgin Mary.
5th	- "Abbo", or "Gabra Manfas qeddus". Both important saints, whose actual anniversaries fall in the rainy season.
12th	- "Mikaël", as a reminder of the miracles ascribed to this arch-

● 796
805
776

- angel. On his actual day, a popular public picnic is held--a major social event.
- 16th - "Kidānā Mehrāt" (Covenant of Mercy).
This is a preferred monthly day on which mahabber sodalities like to gather for private group communion.
- 19th day of the month- "Tahsas Gabriēl". Reminder of the miracles ascribed to this archangel.
- 21st - "Sionā Laryam". Reminder of the annual event of the revelation of Mary after her death.
- 23rd - "Giyorgis". St. George's day.
- 24th - "Tāklā Haymanot". Abyssinian head of church, now sainted, who re-established the "Solomon Dynasty."
- 27th - "Medhane Alām" (Redeemer of the World), i.e. Jesus.
- 28th - "Emmanuel". Another reference to Jesus.
- 29th - "Hāala Mgziabher" (Festival of God), or, "Balā Wold", festival of the birth of Jesus, monthly reminder of Christmas.

796

When the floods of the rainy season recede in early September, the yellow daisy carpets the pasture and the tall green grain begins to mature, the new year begins, with the month Mäskärām. This heralds the first

796 holy day of the year, "Māsāḡāl", Feast of the Cross, on the 17th, and all who can prepare new garments. The countryside is freshly washed from 3 months of rains, and the sun is welcomed. It seems as if nature herself is beginning a new year, another annual cycle.

From St. John's Day, the first day of the year, children begin to gather the plentiful wildflowers, and to bring them to kinfolk across brooks which are again passable. These bouquets of daisies, "Māsāḡāl abāba" i.e. Māsāḡāl flower, are considered "enqutatash" (lit. take this tribute). This symbolism is linked to the first plant brought by the dove to the ark of Noah after the floods, which plant is said to have been the flower "en-gecha"; others say it is because King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba a pearl of the type "enqwe".

In return, the children expect promises of gifts of new clothing for the Māsāḡāl feast. Even adults give "gursha" gifts to each other, of food or other items, and the increasingly generous sunshine and raised level of emotion inclines to generosity. Elders and old women who have turned nun bless every visiting kinsman with the formula:

"Blessed be He, (who) from time to time (one year to the next) has let you pass (in good fortune)."

796 The "Māsāḡāl" Feast of the Cross, in Abyssinian
776 church tradition, dated back to an early Christian Queen "Elēni" (Helena) who sponsored an expedition to Palestine to seek the true cross of the crucifixion. When she found it, she decided to announce the joyous news to her

● 796 own people and to the Christians of Constantinople.

[779] Therefore, she ordered that a tall pole be erected, crown-
ed with a burning torch, called "dammāra". The present
procedure re-enacts this traditional tale, for on the
afternoon preceding the 17th huge poles are stacked up,
parades circle them, and in the evening the stacks are
set afire, lighting up the landscape.

In preparation, some days before Masqal, peasants
and townsmen go to the bush to cut long sticks, so that
they will be dry in time. Pious persons touch them to
the hearthstone and pray that the harvest will be good,
[292] so that they will not have to subsist on cabbage (the
food of poverty). Even the poorest can bring the plenti-
ful yellow "masqal" daisies, tied to the top of the
poles. The stacks are formed on public areas, such as
a marketplace, in front of the church, etc. Adults and
children parade around them at least 3 times, wearing their
best new garments and trinkets. This is an occasion for
girls to be seen at their prettiest, and for young braves
to boast.

Some of the young men form into groups and dance
[535] the "hoya-hoya", refrains of past or future brave deeds.
Warriors perform the loyalty jumping-dance shouting
"Addis Ababa". Sometimes, when the resinous torches
are lit, mock battles develop. Little girls dance rings-
around-the-rosy, while little boys may take the occasion
to burn scars on their forearms as proof of courage and
to be "strong". Pious elders take a brand from the lit
bonfire and rekindle their home hearths, in the hope of

• 796 transferring the blessing of the true cross to their homes.

[184
565] All classes participate in the parade, the bonfire and the worship. There is complete cultural continuum.

Even Emperor Haile Selassie parades around the stake three times, accompanied by highest dignitaries of church and state. In the village, the ceremony awaits the arrival of the local cheqa shum and "great men". Old warriors come dressed in their lion-manes and carry the rhinoceros shields of their youth; they boast heroic deeds in the "fukkara". Priests bless the scene and the people, waving cross and incense burners, "blessing the land", so that the harvest will be rich (much as the water is blessed on Epiphany).

Women, as usual, form their own groups, in impromptu singing and rhythmic handclapping. The men do not overlook them, bringing them ashes and charcoal from the blessed bonfire, from which the women make a paste with butter and smear the sign of the cross on their foreheads.

Children rise early on the day of "dāmāra" to collect their promised gifts. In groups they go from house to house, chanting:

"Let husband and wife consult with each other,
and give us gifts".

Feudal nobles used to take this occasion to acknowledge the knighthood name, the "fārās sem" of young nobles. They also gave a raw beef, "brundo" feast, to their retainers, and a big "gebber"(feast) consuming huge jars full of barley beer, pitchers of mead, and bottles of "araqi" (distilled).

796 While some of this feasting is now less orgiastic than in the past, "axmari" musicians still pass among the feasters, singing praises to the host and noble guests, [534] to the accompaniment of the single-string "masenqo" of male singers, and the banjo-like "qrar" fingered by women axmari. Torchlight parades, both of men and of women, leave the bonfire later, wind toward the nearest river or brook (still full though no longer raging) to enjoy the pleasure of bathing at its best, before the brooks dry to a trickle.

796
182 Thus the first church function of the year is an important factor in unifying this society: significant for all ages, both sexes, all classes; sets a time and place for rites of passage in the life cycle; renders visible paternalistic feudal patterns of human relationships; reopens the annual cycle of economic endeavors (caravans, weaving, etc.); reopens the pattern of kin visiting after the hibernation of 3 months; and reinforces the traditional religious as well as national values and attitudes.

796 In the months that follow there are several religious festivals, which also have social significance. Named after special saint's days, they vary from region to region.

The next widely observed holy day is Christmas, on the 29th day of the month of Tahsas. This does not nearly approach the significance it has in the Western 796 world, nor the Masqal feast just described. In fact, 526 Christmas, "Ledāt" (lit. birthday) is more often refer-

796 red to as "gädda", the name of the hockey-like game play-
 [529] ed by the young men on this day, and for the next two
 weeks. It is a sacerdotal holy day with little social
 significance. The priests congregate in the church of
 the district that bears the name "Iyasus" (Jesus). Ser-
 vices begin at midnight the eve before and end with chant-
 ing and dancing in the sunshine at 9 A.M. when the clergy
 parades in the churchyard.

Old Testament survivals are indicated by one of
 the many minor church celebrations, the feast of "gez-
 rat" (circumcision), celebrating the circumcision of
 Jesus Christ a week after birth, on the 6th day of the
 month of Ter. It is held entirely within the church,
 especially monasteries.⁷⁷

More important than Christmas is Epiphany, "Tam-
 gät", on the 11th of Ter. In the late afternoon preced-
 ing this day, the "tabot" are carried out of all churches,
 swathed in imported silks and borne on the heads of
 priests, in vast ceremonial parades that stop frequently
 for chanting and ceremonial dancing, until the proces-
 sion, which includes national flags, arrives at the wa-
 ter. There a solid, large tent has been erected to house
 these sacred objects.

Evening chants and dances are continued to the
 beat of drums and tinkle of sistra, until the last light
 fades. The faithful surround the tent all night long as
 guard of honor, while feasting and drinking continues.

77. The circumcision of Jesus is also celebrated by the
 Christian Alawites, in Syria. See Janot, E.: La Famille
 Alawite. Les Missions Catholiques, 65, Paris, Aout 1933,
 pp. 381-384.

296

" After dawn, the priests are again ready, awaiting only the arrival of the bishop, the governor and other officials, before resuming the services which this time include the re-baptism of the populace. Lighted candles are set afloat on the pond, and the bishop, after reciting blessings over the water and the future light and heavy rains, dips the cross in the water and sprinkles it over the governor and other "great men"; then lesser priests take over until every man is sprinkled. Very pious and rustic peasants jump into the water, younger boys strip and swim in the pond usually filled for this occasion. Amidst further chants and dancing, the procession slowly winds its way back, stopping at crossroads to take leave of the various "tabot" returning to their own churches. Only the "tabot" of "Mikael" remains at the water, for the following day belongs to that archangel.

The same ceremony as in villages, is followed in the capital. In national sports, the "ganna" season (hockey) ends that day, and the "guks" season of horsemanship and lance-throwing in mock pursuit, begins. The latter name is therefore closely connected with Temqät.

[262]

Among the many minor feasts and fasts that follow, another Old Testament survival stands out. It stands out as a 3-day fast--no animal products, and no food before noon), from the 8th to the 10th of Yakatit, called "tsomä nänäwe", reminiscent of the Fast of Nineveh mentioned in the Bible. It is observed only by church students and clergy, but is more widely known than "gezrat".

796
262 As soon as this is over, a period of intensive meat-eating begins, similar to European carne-vale (carnival), for the same reason: the long lanten period is approaching, and in Abyssinia this means also abstention from eggs, cheese, milk, and other animal products (some even avoid fish), just as on any Wednesday and Friday; and no food before noon, for the strictly observant. The fast is obeyed by nearly everyone, in all classes. This fast begins on the 22nd day of Yekatit, and is called "kudade" (lit. suffering) to indicate both the suffering of Jesus and of the faster. It is also referred to as "arba tom" (lit. 40-fast) though in fact the fast lasts 55 days. Women prepare a variety of vegetable and grain dishes, to substitute for the absence of more solid food.

796
[71] Finally, on the 17th day of the month of Miyarya, the long-awaited Easter, "Fassika" (related to the Hebrew Passover, "Passah" etymologically), occurs.

It is the climax of a week of preparations during which the lanten "hudadey" sharpens. This week is called "hemamat" (passion, extreme suffering), and no work is done, symbolizing the sympathy with the weakness and suffering of Jesus. Even the Saturday market is cancelled--the only time this happens.

[43] Purchasers of meat and supplies for Easter must do their shopping on Thursday, when a special big market is held. The price of sheep, etc., goes up sharply, even doubles, in anticipation of the feast. Even tyeff and pepper (bärbärē) become more expensive. Ethnic craftsmen take this opportunity to bring their products,

796 selling plowpoints for the plowing that will soon begin when the light rains have softened the ground.

[262]

On this Thursday, the pious begin a 3-day fast, taking only dry peas and water after the noon hour. Good

796
857

Friday, called "seqlät", is on the 15th of Miyanya. Children, too young to fast, are given special privileges of impertinence that day. (For are not all rules suspended now that the Savior himself is dying?). From sunrise on, boys and girls knock at doors of huts and houses, chanting:

[539]

"Musha-musho, (nonsense rhyme, meaning lamentation, funeral chant)

we come for your crucifixion (Oh Christ);

Fill (our hands) with flour (ye women),

we are many as fleas".

Musho-musho,

May He (God) give ye fat cattle,

children in your womb;

give us gifts!"

They are given freshly-baked bread being prepared for the Easter feast, but they keep on demanding, making the most of this rare freedom, insulting and mocking the stingy hosts. They may carry an effigy corpse of the latter, as if to his funeral, weeping and lamenting his "lekao" (funeral eulogy). Some boys dress as priests, the girls imitating hysterical women relatives, until they bury him with full ceremonials on the market place, to the great amusement of the adult audience.

776

Adults on this Friday rise early for morning wor-

● 796 ship, perform the "segdat" (prostration) many times.

This signifies the climax of lenten suffering. Toward evening, when Christ is presumed to have died on the cross, the pious are of good cheer, for He has descended to purgatory, has tied the devil hand and foot, and has liberated all the souls to paradise.

796 At earliest dawn Saturday morning, about 5:30,
793 priests and deacons put on their best garments, including "kapa" (cape) and "lämd", carry their colorful sun umbrellas as if in procession, and pass through the streets with parade cross, bell, incense burners, and armsful of yellow-green palm strips called "qetäma". They stop before every house or hut, ringing the bell. The sleepy owner answering the call is given the reed to wind flat around his forehead, and he will wear it all day. The priest sings out: "Oh, master, Jesus Christ has been found! The devil is chained!". In appreciation of the good news, the head of the house gives the priest some money, and receives a blessing in return. This ceremonial interchange is called "Gebra salan" (serving the greeting).

796 Sometime before midnight, the church services begin, with alternately mournful and hopeful liturgy. When the night is about to end, at cockerow Sunday morning (about 4 A.M.) the resurrection, ("tensä") is loudly declared amidst shouting and ringing of bells.

[E] The pious now break fast with crushed linseed ("talba") mixed with honey, and pronounce the blessing of having been permitted to reach this day. All rush out of the

- 796 smoky, incense-filled church, to reach home and begin the feasting on meat. Sheep are rapidly slaughtered all over the area, fires are lit, pepper stew is boiling everywhere, and the vast jars of barley beer, injera, coffee, and milk and butter are consumed. This feasting, often ruinous to the digestion, continues for some time, for the Wednesday and Friday fasts are abrogated for the next 50 days.

With regained strength, fired by good food and beer, the young men begin games of javelin throwing. [529] Ball games ("qenchebt?") continue the entire following week, when the heavy feasting still keeps work to a minimum.

The last outdoor picnic before the rains takes place occurs on the 1st day of the month of "Genbot", when the "Ledata" (birthday) of the Virgin Mary is celebrated. The leafy outdoor shelter, "dasa", is erected for this occasion. Both women and men take part, though in separate groups. At the end of the day, some women [789] "clean house" of evil spirits, to keep them away while shut in during the rainy season. This is done by casting boiled "nefro" porridge into the bush, telling the personified sickness to go after it.

[262] During the next church holydays, fish, particularly the "senro", become staples of the menu of priests and others, since rivers begin to fill with water and fish are more plentiful. There is a church festival "rabbä kahnat" (lit. inventory of the priests), a purely internal affair,

796

The holy day which now symbolized most strongly the union of church and state occurs just after the climax of the rainy season. On the 7th day of the month of Nahase occurs the feast of the Trinity, "Selassyē", which the present emperor adopted as his imperial name at coronation. On this day, the "tabot" from the local "Selassyē" church is taken on a colorful, though usually rain-drenched parade. In some regions this feast is called "Abba Abraham", because it is believed that the day also commemorates the Old Testament event when 3 angels visited Rather Abraham. The parade includes also many national flags of the (secular) state, and photographs of the bearded emperor, carried by deacons. Loyalty shouts of "Addis Ababa" are frequently heard.

[184]

The last important socio-religious holy day is "Buhe", the Transfiguration of Jesus, on the 13th of the same month. It is also called "Dāwra Tabor", because it is believed to have taken place on Mt. Tabor in ancient Palestine. Again a church bearing that name is chosen as center of the celebration. Buhe is also a feast of lights, perhaps to symbolize the hope that the rainclouds will soon part and let the sun be seen

[373]

once again. There are torchlight parades, the torches made from braided, resinous barks, carried on the way to the church just before sunrise. All shout "Buhe, Buhe" on many occasions on this day. It is a family holiday remembered all through life by the children. On this day the hearths are brightly lit, and mothers bake a special wheaten bread for the children. Even

- 776 the youngest are lifted to see the parade. Boys and
[857] girls age 7 to 15 go from hut to hut starting in the early
morning, chanting "Buhe, Buhe", "hoyya", hoyyo, ho", and
verses:

[539]

"All shout 'Buhe!, children all!

Give us what (you have) prepared; Do not change
(your mind): "

"When the rooster has crowed, night is gone;
After Buhe, the winter(rainy season) is gone".

796
526
[411]

Long whips, mostly of finely braided fibre, of
tree bark or "tucha" grass, are made before Buhe, and
young men practice with them until they can hit even
small targets easily. On Buhe afternoon, two groups of
contestants face each other, often across a swollen
brook, and line up so that each individual faces an op-
ponent of equal skill and strength. They come armed
with the whips, and begin to warm up by hurling insults
at each other, addressing each other in the female gen-
der. Soon the game of aiming at the face and ducking
the adversary's whip begins. The whip has a short
wooden handle, but the strap may be as long as 15 feet.
Sometimes this opportunity is taken to work out grudge
fights. For, traditionally, any wounds incurred, even
the loss of an eye, cannot be taken to court or cause
a feud, as the result of this ritual battle. No other
weapons may be used. The losers flee, are pursued to
their huts, and the victors are entitled to all the

796 food of the feast prepared by the losing side.

526

In the evening "fires of joy" are lit, where the rain-drenched, weary and sore contestants and others can dry out, drink barley beer, and are supposed to forget and forgive the hostilities. Some may still boast of individual feats of heroism, in Amhara warrior style; others will sulk. But generally the day ends in harmony, after the excitement which itself was a welcome break in the monotonous hibernation of the rainy season.

796

The end of the annual cycle coincides with the end of the rainy season. The last 5 days (in leap years 6 days) are added after the end of the last month, and are called "Pagumēn" or "Qwagnē". On the 3rd day the

[776]

annual festival of St. Raphael, called "geddus Rufael", the water saint, takes place. The rain, which still falls

[821]

heavily that day, is considered "tebel" (holy water) and to have the power to dull the poison of snakes so

[787]

that their bites will not be fatal. Much rain during Pagumēn is taken as an omen that the crops will be good.

796

874

This day is final examination day for the boys who have attended church school long enough to be promoted to "deacon". They are examined in correct chanting of liturgy and prayers. To be mentally wide awake they often go to the dabbara beforehand, and, for a small gift, obtain the stimulating herb "esa fars" (lit. Persian wood) or drink boiled "astānagär" (lit. the plant that makes to talk), which also helps to overcome stage-fright.

796

857

539

The younger children go from hut to hut, chanting:
"In the name of Rufael,

796
857
[539]
from the bin of peas
fill me up.

Thereupon the householder gives them a handful of shem-bera peas, which they roast to "qolo", and this symbol, too, is considered to invite a good crop.

796
805
[65]
The 5th or last day of Hagumen is the annual feast day of St. John. The "tabot" from his church is carried to water very early in the morning, and the men bathe in the river. The old year is symbolically buried, in some regions, by ceremonial burial of the book "Lefafa Tsedeq" (Scroll of Righteousness) which resembles in part the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. The day is traditionally also the end of the fiscal budget year, on which the nagadras, the appointee over commerce, had to pay the feudal tribute to his lord (at least a large jar of beer and 20 enjara breads) in addition to squaring his accounts.

That evening torches are lit, for this is the beginning of a new year.

c) The Religious Life Cycle of the Lay Individual.

852
Baptism usually occurs after 40 days for boys, still later for girl babies, sometimes as long as 80 days. This practice is based on Old Testament patterns, and more directly, on the period of 40 days that the Virgin Mary herself had to segregate herself from the Temple after the birth of Jesus. (The Falasha Jews of Abyssinia is concerned less that a baby might die

795 led by a comparatively tolerant and rarely learned clergy, even loyal and observant Abyssinian Christians frequently follow practices of other religions without being ostracized or even criticized.

755 In the middle of the preparations for "Käsqäl", the Feast of the Cross, emotionally ill or despondent patients believed to be possessed by an "evil" Zar or "Buda" spirit, are taken by their relatives into the incipient sunshine and deposited at a spot where trails form a crossroad. A doctor of the "Zar" religious cult (see later description) performs incantations, using incense to lure the Zar. Then a chicken is slaughtered, with the Christian formula pronounced over it. This cure is believed to be particularly effective if the Zar spirit is a Coptic Christian himself, who will then feed on the properly slaughtered chicken and leave the patient alone.

796 On Fassika, the Coptic Easter, Ethiopian Muslims
795 living in Coptic provinces have an equivalent feast, in which many Coptic Christian women and small children passively participate only a few hours after they have returned home from all-night prayers at the church. Even more curious is the fact that this particular Ethiopian-Muslim holy day celebrated near Gondar the day of a Muslim saint called "Sheykh Abader", is celebrated according to the Coptic, not the Muslim, calendar. (There is a parallel to such calendar syncretism in Egypt, where the founder of a dervish order, Ahmed el-Badawi, is celebrated at his tomb according to the Coptic calendar. 78

78. Littmann, E.: Ahmed el-Badawi, ein Lied auf den ägyptischen Nationalheiligen. Akad. Wiss. u. Lit., Mainz, 1950, No. 3.

796
795 On Easter, the Muslim worshippers of Saint Sheykh Abader leave Gondar town beginning at dawn, for a hill about half an hour's walking distance to the east, bringing with them about 100 live sheep, each donated by a family. This is the hour when the Christians still feast on meat and beer. The hill is far enough away so that the rival religions do not annoy each other, but in the belief of the worshippers, the miracle of a water spring [3/2] will recur on this particular hill on this saint's day, despite the seasonal dryness which is then at its height making water a valuable and much desired commodity.

The Muslim men seat themselves on one side of the hill, the Muslim women, their hair covered with colorful red kerchiefs, on the other. Some erect shelters against the mounting sun. The men proceed to slaughter the sheep, away from the groups, with the formula "In the name of Allah the all-merciful and Muhammad his prophet". The meat is well roasted, then passed around in baskets, the pieces already cut to individual portions. There is plenty for everyone. There is also wheat bread ("qitta").

The Muslim leader meanwhile has proceeded half way up the hill, at a spot midway between the men and the women, and has begun to dig a hole about three feet deep. The water table is sufficiently high here so that muddy water begins to accumulate in the hole gradually. He digs another few inches, and more water accumulate. A half-gourd, sliced lengthwise, is brought and he reaches into the hole and begins to pass up the water. When the silt has settled in the bottom of the gourd, it is

⁷⁷⁶
⁷¹⁵ held high, and everyone acclaims the miracle. Every-
one tries to obtain some of the water to drink; the
bottom of the hole keeps filling up for some time. La-
ter, mud from the hole is passed around on green leaves,
[75] and many, especially women, smear it on their foreheads,
against sickness, demons, and barrenness which afflicts
many of the townswomen. Some older Muslims recite pray-
ers. The mood is generally gay, and the women banter
happily from an hour after sunrise to high noon, when
the feast is over. Then all begin to return to Gondar
town, after pledging gifts for the next celebration of
the saint's day, provided he has fulfilled their prayers.

Meanwhile, Copts, mostly women, including many
barren ones, have joined the Muslim women on the hill.
No special notice is taken of them; they are tolerated,
and not insulted as they would be on other occasions.
The Copts bring their own live sheep and the few Coptic
men present slaughter them apart from the Muslims, so
that their formula "In the name of the Father, the Son,
the Holy Ghost, One Divinity", is not heard. The Chris-
tian women and children also smear some of the saint's
mud on their foreheads, and also vow donations to the
next Sheykh Abader feast if their prayers are fulfilled.
[78] They bear the tell-tale marks until they reach their
own homes in Gondar, and are not punished for what other-
wise might at least require re-baptism. Like Muslims,
they even bring mud, rocks, and water from the saint's
hill to their ill kinfolk. Coptic men do not flaunt their
participation so freely. The Coptic priests, who of

716
715 course know what is going on, ignore the whole matter,
just as they ignore the Zar worship.

795
788 Parallels to such religious syncretism are found
not only in Egypt, but also in Syria, where Christian
women go on short-range pilgrimage to the tomb of "well"
saints and smear mud from holy springs on their faces
on a certain day of the Christian religious calendar.⁷⁹
This takes place in rural areas of Homs, but even near
Damascus Muslims take part in celebrating the day of the
Feast of the Cross in September.⁸⁰ Just as in visits to
the tomb of water saints in Muslim Algeria,⁸¹ the pil-
grimage to Sheykh Abader is believed to bring on the
light rains, which usually begin about that time, making
early plowing and a good harvest possible. This is equal-
ly desired by both Muslims and Copts, just as individual
good health is desired by both. Perhaps this unexpres-
sed recognition explains the paradox of this religious
syncretism.

f) The Church and the Present National State.

714
659 Three phases can be distinguished in the recent
relations of the Abyssinian church and the Amharic
"Solomonic Dynasty" which the church returned to power
in the 13th century but which now attempts to modernize

79. Gaulmier, J.: Pèlerinages Populaires à Hama. Bulletin
d'Etudes Orientales, 1931, Vol.1, pp.137-152.

80. Tresse, R.: Usages Saisonnières. Revue d'Etudes Ori-
entales 1937, pp. 1-4; Lecerf & Tresse: Les Arada de
Damas. BEO, 7-8, pp.236-264.

81. Frobst-Siraben, J.H.: Pour La Pluie de Printemps en
Algerie. en Terre d'Islam, 22, 1942, pp. 264-272.

575 church, fills several voids in Amhara social organization, and establishes links of human relationships which otherwise leave little choice to the individual of any age and sex beyond his assigned roles in the feudal system, church, and family.

Perhaps this is why there are so many facets to the "mahabbär" association, and why it is called upon by its members to fulfill so many functions that in many other human societies take separate forms. To a considerable extent the mahabbär maintains an elastic equilibrium between the individual and the society. For in this association he can exercise a personal choice; he can cross boundary lines of age and sex, and occasionally even of class; here he has the rare opportunity of new experience in interpersonal relations; here he finds economic as well as emotional security; recognition of his status in a highly respectable association; the response of life-long personal friends.

576
796 The mahabbär in Abyssinia may be as old as Coptic Christianity itself in that country. It is based on the "private communion", one of the few instances in which the sacerdotal church concerns itself with the layman, probably because the time and place of mahabbär meeting leave them remote from the ritually sacred precincts of the church buildings. By the same token the mahabbär enables the church to extend a broad control over its lay members.

The religious basis of this private communion rests on the monthly meeting of its members for worship, in the hut of one of them (they take turns as hosts).

575 The preferred number of charter members is 12. The
 796 reason is not certain, but some ascribe it to the 12
 apostles, some so that each member has the duty and pri-
 vilege of acting as host once a year. The evening it-
 self, within each month, is preferably the host's. The
 host asks his confessor-priest to officiate during the
 religious part of the meeting. Part of the worship al-
 ways includes ceremonial drinking from a special clay
 cup called "tuwa", or "suwa", which is dedicated to a
 saint or archangel, and from which the particular mā-
 habbār takes its name (e.g. the "tuwa-ef-Gabriel māhab-
 bār"). The host has prepared a large "gan" (largest
 clay jar) of barley beer, which is blessed by the offi-
 ciating priest. There is also ceremonial breaking of
 bread, the well-baked kind usually called "dabye",
 preferably of wheat, and half an inch thick, which, on
 this occasion, is referred to as "tadiq" (lit. offering
 of righteousness), or as "shellemlāmi" (a reference to
 [53] the cross). This bread is sometimes adorned with in-
 [55] cised geometric designs. A poor host may substitute
 the common limp enjāra bread, but that would lower his
 prestige. A rich host or one trying to gain prestige
 will have carpets spread on the dirt floor, and even
 the poorest can spread odoriferous grasses and leaves,
 to give the hut a clean and festive atmosphere.

The members congregate at dusk, some a bit ear-
 lier because of the Amhara aversion to travel after
 sundown. When the confessor-priest is seen to approach,
 the members rise and redrape their shammās in the symbol

575 of going to church. The priest brings the holy water,
796 sprinkles the inside of the hut, and intones prayers.

At the proper moments, the members prostrate themselves before the "tuwa" cup containing specially blessed barley beer. The "tadiq" bread is placed on the wicker worktable ("māsob"), and is then divided by the confessor-priest among the members; the leftovers go to the host's wife who had baked it but who remains modestly in the background. Some of this blessed delicacy is given to the poor. The confessor absolves all present from sins, then passes the "tuwa" around so that everyone can drink from it. Then lots are drawn by means of sticks to see who the next host will be for the "tuwa" and "tadiq". The ceremonial phase is now over.

[534]

Roasted barley ("qolo") and peppery stew ("wot") are served in as many varieties and quantities as the host can afford, and many go beyond their means to gain prestige. Drummers and chanters ("azmari") are often hired, and the noisy entertainment is heard in a wide area, attracting many uninvited guests who sit outside the hut and hope to share in some way in the food or entertainment.

575

Women usually have their own mahabbar sodalities, and usually name them in dedication to some event in the life of the Virgin Mary ("Maryam"). But sometimes women attach themselves to a male mahabbar as a kind of auxiliary, sitting on a mat by themselves in a corner, and tolerated because of their services in preparing beer, bread and stew, or even honored if they are heir-

883 The random play activity of younger girls gives play to more structured activities. Girls still work and play in groups but seek to meet groups of young men somewhat older than themselves. Flirting becomes patterned and self-conscious, and behavior in the presence of elders more subdued. Aggressive playfulness, disregarded often before puberty, is severely criticized henceforth.

883
584 Saturday afternoons are preferred times for the gathering of "qonje" girls, for they then go greater distances into the bush to fetch firewood for Sunday. Usually the girls, age 13 to 16, sing loudly so as to attract the group of young men, age 15 to 20, who thereupon follow them at a certain distance. From time to time, the girls, leading the boys on, stop, and dance around like playful little girls, alternately holding each other by the hand, or spinning like a top. This is a signal to the boys to approach, as if by accident, and couples begin to break off from the group to go for a "shershsher", a promenade, while still gathering deadwood. Since the boys are from nearby hamlets, the youngsters and their parents know each other.

584
796 In the annual cycle of events, three occasions are utilized as landmarks of opportunity in serious flirting, informal courtship, leading to the rapidly ensuing first marriage of the adolescent girl.

The first occurs on "Mika'el", St. Michael's day, on the 12th day of the month of Hedar, which is celebrated as a kind of Thanksgiving day, for it falls just after the major harvest is completed, in late November. For all ages it is a day of picnics, out in the open, under a bright sunny sky in the first part of the dry season, before the green grass is entirely scorched yellow. Teges have been

584
796
● freshly washed. The day begins with chanting in the church at dawn, parading of the local "tabot" of Mikael, accompanied by the "allel" joyshout of the women. Large shelters ("dass") are set up in the open, about noontime, and feasting and beer drinking continue until the late evening.

This day is awaited and prepared for by the adolescent girls who have just concluded their task of watching the harvest from elevated platforms guarding the maturing crop. On this day they use the platforms as shelters, under which they invite their boy friends. The girls bring live chickens, the boys kill them, pronouncing the religious formula over the chickens. The girls then cook them in earthenware pots with appropriate spices and pepper, thus advertising their abilities in cooking and housewifely arts. The girls wear a fresh hairdo, often pomaded (sometimes for the first time) with "ades" - boiled and perfumed butter; their palms reddened with "ansosela" like a grown woman, and lemons and "ades" odorific branches in the folds of their freshly washed heavy cotton frocks. Prepared in this fashion, they begin to attract the boys even while the elders are still in church during morning services. A group of girls will gather within sight of the churchyard, shouting "allel" at the proper times, dancing their girlish rounds. As soon as they can, the young men thereupon detach themselves from the churchyard or outer enclosure, surround the girls, and feel out their individual popularity by teasing and tickling their chosen girls with olive branches. If a girl agrees to consider a boy, she gives him a lemon or an "ades" branch, which invites him to a "shershsher" at her platform-shelter.

The second annual occasion presents itself on the biggest out-

584
796 door event of the year, the church parades on Epiphany ("Temoat"), in connection with the "guka" tournament of the young men. Dressed up in holiday fashion, the "qonje" girls eagerly follow the fortunes of their preferred boy friends. When no elders are within hearing, some girls direct teasing shouts of encouragement at the young men, even occasionally "ellal" (reserved for church ritual earlier that day). This day is the climax of the informal courtship - serious flirting season, in mid-January.

The third and final occasion occurs on Easter, "Fassika", at the very end of the dry season, just before social activities move indoors. For this holy day, the girls have once more washed their [302] garments despite the shortage of water, reddened their palms, prepared the hairdo. Everyone is in a happy mood, for the long lenten season is over, and meat is consumed in greater quantities than at any other time. There is an element of urgency in social relations, for this is the second and final marriage season, and soon all social life and kin visiting comes to an end for four long, dreary, rainy, chilly months.

It is on the basis of such informal courtship, climaxed on these three annual occasions but continuing in-between, that a young man requests his father to initiate negotiations for marriage by sending an intermediary to the girl's family. If the match seems suitable to the elders, negotiations begin.

4. Adulthood and Marriage: Dominance of the Kin.

582 A girl's first marriage nearly always takes place before she is fully adult, physically as well as in maturity of character; while the bridegroom, though also young, is physically adult and in

627

X 794
796 From this complex array of the plaguing - but often also protective-spirit world, it becomes clear that there is a great deal of significance in the zar cult beyond mere healing of mental ailments; even beyond the organizing of patients into groups of devotees - a kind of group therapy with religious overtones. There is an extension of the acquired "protection" so that some zars become not only protective spirits of individuals, but patron saints of certain social groups in Amhara society, e.g. some specialize in the rich and noble, some in the poor or low-class; some in hunters and warriors; etc. But although religious affiliations are usually identified sharply, there is considerable crossing of the lines in the spirit world so that Coptic Christian spirits may have Muslim names, and even practice religious intermarriage. Another important contribution made by the zar cult is that it orders nature, explains nature to the Amhara mind, yet allows enough flexibility (e.g. in regional variations, and the continuously increasing and decreasing power of individual zars) to admit new information, new revelations, to be fitted into the traditional construct. For example, in the 1930's the dominant zar spirit in Gondar was Sayfu Chāngār (ascertained by a French expedition); in 1953/1954 it was Aweliya. Since zar spirits can have successful and unsuccessful careers, so can humans; hence, new ideas, even modern ones, can be fitted into the spiritual world.

But the major character of the "zar" complex is that of a healing cult.

X 794
796 c. The Annual Convention ("amat bal") of the "Zar" Doctors; Voluntary Possession in the "Zar" Cult.

On the 23rd night of the month of Yakatit, the day before the beginning of the Coptic Christian lent, the "zar" doctors of Gondar hold

x 794 their annual convention, ("amat bal", lit. the annual event). This is
756 about the time when the rest of the Christian world celebrates its
● 796 mardi Gras, Carnevale, Fasching. The timing of the convention is
probably no accident, for there be, as, the day after the noisy
Convention, the period of "kudadū" (lit. suffering) in the life of
Christ, priests would hardly permit the noisy and gay celebration during
lent.

The convention takes place in Addis Alām (lit. new world), the
oldest section of Gondar town, once restricted to Muslims and other
non-Copts.

Unlike Western Conventions of doctors and scientists, the sar
Convention does not consist of calm, objective, sometimes monotonous
and even icy presentations. Instead, in the convention of "sar" doctors
new techniques are subjectively demonstrated on participant sar
devotees who are chronically possessed; diagnostic aids are utilized in
actual treatment of actual patients; new poetry to cajole specific
spirits is recited in ecstatic chants to the beat of the drum, while
the audience joins in with refrain-chanting and rhythmic handclapping.
It is a super - "wādāja" (lit. love-feast) of the sar cult, banger and
better than ordinary sar cult activities, and introducing new
experience, but in principle follows the same basic procedures of
luring protective sars into public "possession" of the afflicted,
and enlisting them in the diagnosis and treatment of ailments caused
by evil or mischievous sar spirits.

x 794 In view of the esoteric elements in the sar cult, it is little
756 wonder that the "amat bal" is restricted to sar doctors and permanent
123 devotees. Therefore it was not easy for a "European" observer like the
796

629

X794 present author to be permitted to attend this all-night session.
756 Careful negotiations through a trusted intermediary person had to be
123 arranged ahead of time. For at any time the chief of the zar doctors
796 could end the negotiations on the ground that some of the "zar" spirits would be offended or repelled, and refuse to come into full possession of their "horses" in the presence of a stranger. An additional antagonistic element was fear of the local police detectives, who, though they do not interfere with the zar cult, have orders from the self-conscious central government not to let foreigners witness it.

X794 The chief zar doctor of Gondar in the present generation is the
756 Lady (woysarof) Salantew. She is renowned even outside the entire province (Begemdir-Semyen), as far as Tigre province and even in Addis Ababa. This is perhaps more due to her position than her own initiative, for Gondar has long been considered the city of powerful spirits and traditions. She leaves most healing activities to her disciple "balä zar", except for very stubborn cases. More often she is busy as "consultant", for many clients, even non-devotees of the zar cult, bring their family or business or litigation problems to her. She herself is possessed by several powerful, protective male zars, to whom she ascribes her various powers, from whom she receives inspiration, the spirit of enterprise, courage to experiment in perfect comfort and security without the fear of the evil eye which hampers other individuals engaging in anything new.

She is not afraid of the pinpricks of medium and minor "zar" spirits, for her whole life is devoted to the service of the most powerful ones. One of the latter has strong Coptic Christian affiliations and learning, and guides her in her cautious and unofficial

X 794
796
123 not to cross the boundary in front of the stage again. He is not to approach the house until well after nightfall, and is to come by a back trail, so as not to be seen by passersby.

X 794
796
123 Thus, after nightfall on the 23rd of the month of Yakatit, he climbed over eroded back trails down to the "Kokit" section of Addis Alām and approached the house of Lady Salāmtu where her devotees were assembled. It was 7:30 P.M. More oil lamps had been lit. There were about 20 women, but a male sar doctor with talents in poetry and chanting sat near the stage, wearing a white turban much like a Coptic Abyssinian priest. A powerful male drummer had been hired for the occasion.

X 794
796
[123] Lady Salāmtu still took no official notice of the foreigner, for her sar had not yet "descended", and without that she was just a hollow shell, a mute "horse". One of her brothers motioned the foreigner politely to a seat on the mudbench that ringed the wall. There was much subdued whispering, as if a momentous event was about to take place. The hairdos of several of the women devotees and doctors had been specially arranged to honor their individual sars: those not permitted to cut their hair had plaited it into a braid ("surosh") surrounding the skull; others had shaved a circle in the middle (called "gucho"), like a little girl.

X 794
796
778 Other preparations and paraphernalia included the ritual coffee trays ("gānda"), which symbolized the wooden "tabot" (sacred tablet) of the holy Coptic city of Aksum, and which were dedicated to several sars including Sayfu Chāngār and Rahēlo. The ancient mother of many sars, named "Werār" was believed to have stolen the original "tabot"

^x 794 from Aksum (just as Menelik I is regarded by the Coptic Abyssinians to
796 have brought it to Aksum from Solomon's Holy of Holies at the temple
778 in Jerusalem). But the tabot of the sars also symbolized the outdoor
tree stump which serves the invisible sar spirits as a table. Thus,
partaking of refreshments from the coffee trays constituted a kind of
communion with the sar spirit to whom the tray was dedicated, although
this was done only during intermissions of the cult services. On one
tablet, the "araqi" supplied by the foreigner stood ready.

^x 794 In the corners, more types of incense were burning than before.
796 In addition to "etan" (frankincense), the domestic Ethiopian "bukbuka"
782 was sending up clouds of perfumed smoke. Leaves of "wogart", believed
pleasing to the sar that causes headaches and neuralgic pains, were
occasionally placed on the clay incense burners. From time to time,
some imported pebbles of yellow sulphur ("kabre" or "din") sent up
acid smoke. But the sweet odor of most types of incense predominated
most of the time.

^x 794 About 8:30, the drummer brought his heavy drum down from beneath the
796 solidly built roof, and began to drum slowly, rhythmically, still subdued.
756 The curtain was lowered, but the shadow of Lady Salantew behind it could
781 still be vaguely seen. Suddenly raucous grunts began to be heard from
533 behind the curtain, emanating from Woyzärä Saläntew. This meant that
her first major sar had arrived, and was beginning to descend into her,
performing the magical catus. Her joyshouts became louder, higher-
pitched, turning to shrieks, quicker and quicker. She was beginning
to perform the "gurri" victory dance of the sar who had conquered her.

Immediately the women devotees began to handclap rhythmically,
gradually quickening their tempo, in time to the twisting and turning

X 794 of Lady Salantew's body. The twisting began like an embrace, with her
 796 head thrown back, rotating movements of the chest, followed by a
 756 rhythmic forward bump of belly and hips. Her ecstatic shrieks varied
 781 from pain to exultation (like the "allel" of women in the Coptic church service). Encouraging shouts came from individual women in the audience, and some raised their holiday - reddened palms in prayerful joy. As the climax approached, the jerky twisting of Lady Salantew's body gradually changed to smoother movements of the limbs. She was now well in tune with her zar, and he was comfortable within her. The excitement in the audience changed to warm and glowing emotion at the same time. Then Lady Salantew emitted a loud scream, and dropped in a heap. The drum stopped abruptly. There was a sudden hush in the audience. The strong sweet odor of generously burned incense pervaded the consciousness and its smoke leisurely curled upward.

X 794 It was only a matter of minutes before Lady Salantew recovered.
 796 Her brother pulled the curtain to one side. Her eyes were bright with curiosity as she glanced about the house as if she had just arrived. She had lost her absent-minded appearance, for now the zar acted and spoke through her. Suddenly she appeared to notice the foreigner for the first time, smiled and waved a friendly greeting. Her voice was still husky, but warm, as she called out "how are you" in understandable Amharic, rather than her esoteric "zar language"; this was a courtesy, though
 [795] she used the female familiar gender (the zar often uses the inverted
 [723] genders in address). She further inquired whether the foreigner was sitting in comfort, and how his health was today (hinting at the "ailments" he had used as a pretext). Then she ordered the handmaidens to offer the foreigner tälla (barley beer), and coffee, on one of the zar coffee trays.

X 794
782
796

She then proceeded to greet the individual sar doctors and devotees as if she had been absent a long time. Each rose and bowed deeply to her. Barley beer was now passed around freely, while coffee beans were being roasted and crushed, in preparation for the next intermission.

X 794
782
796
[533]

Refreshed and heartened, the male sar doctor serving as poet now began to chant the hymns he had composed in honor of "aweliya" the chief male sar of Lady Salamtew. The rhythm was as formal as the hymns chanted by the dabtara in the Coptic Abyssinian church, but contained Arabic loanwords borrowed from the traders' vernacular. The audience quickly leaned the response and accompanied the responsive chant with rhythmic handclapping:

Poet: "Salaam" (lit. "Peace", greeting; similar in Gees and Arabic languages).

Crowd: "Salaam Alökum" (lit. "Peace be with you", in Arabic).

Poet (continuing in Amharic): "Enter, warrior; enter warrior!"

Crowd: (repeats the same words).

Poet: "Lord Aweliya, what have I given to him (polite address) that he may be merciful to me?"

Crowd: (repeats same chant in more wailing pitch).

Poet: "Flower (synonym for youth), oh sar, flower!"

Crowd: (repeats)

Poet: "He is Lord of Sera, Lord of Mera is he". (Polite address).

Crowd: (repeats).

Poet: "He, bridegroom Zar! Bridegroom Zar!"

Crowd: "Bridegroom Zar! Bridegroom Zar!"

Poet: "Like a lion, like a leopard, when he roars!"

Crowd: (repeats).

~~774~~
~~782~~
~~776~~ Poet: "My witness (also can mean "faith"), Aweliya; my witness!"

Crowd: (repeats).

Poet: "May it be, to be healed, let me be!"

Crowd: (repeats)

Poet: "My prophet, my prophet, peace be with you".

Crowd: (repeats).

Now that Aweliya has been greeted and his protection invoked, individual "balā sar" (sar doctors as well as chronically possessed patient-devotees) can invite and lure their individual sars to take public "possession" of the devotee, who then dances the individual "gurri" victory dance of the particular sar. In luring the sar, they invite him with incense that he likes and with poetry composed by the sar doctor who serves as the poet of the convention.

It is now 9:30 P.M. Now that Sweliya, a Coptic sar is present, the poet invites Galla sar spirits from the Raya and Azabo territory of eastern Ethiopia:

Poet (chanting): "Aweliya, you are merciful, merciful you are;
my Lord, you are merciful".

Crowd: "Yehun" (lit. "May he be", polite address; this is a frequent refrain).

Poet: "If we believe in you, if we have faith, Aweliya, you will be merciful!"

Crowd: "Amēn".

Poet: "Hear, oh prophet, we greet you; hear, oh prophet, we greet you!"

Crowd: "May you be" (greeted).

Poet: "The coffee has boiled,
the pilgrimage has been fulfilled;
hear, oh prophet, we greet you".

X 794
782
796 Crowd: "Amēn".

Post: "Raya, Raya, we are calling;
Asābo, Asābo, we are calling!"

Crowd: "May you be".

Post: "This will bring him to me;
now it will entice him!"

Crowd: "Amēn".

Post: "Asābo ! Raya ! I am calling!"

X 794
781
796 When he stops there is an expectant hush. A woman sar doctor seated on a mat amid the crowd begins to sway backward and forward, still in a sitting position. All eyes turn to her, for this is the beginning of the "gurri" of her sar, and the spirit is beginning to move her. She begins to rise, still swaying. Her neighbors hold her lightly for a moment and remove her long necklaces which have metal objects attached that might hurt her or someone else in the spinning movements that are to follow. Now fully on her feet, the possessed begins to twirl, emitting hoarse shrieks. She spins faster and faster, like a top. Several times she slows a little, raises her arms rhythmically, and contorts head, then chest, belly and hips, while her sar descends into magic coitus with her. Each time she spins again, to the ever faster rhythm of the drum and the rhythmic handclapping. The other women encourage her on to the orgasmic climax with shouts of "ahun" (now) and "yahun" (let it be). Her shrieks turn to long whines. After about 15 minutes of this "gurri", she falls in a heap, suddenly, exhausted, shouting "ahun" (now) herself with her last effort, then lies silent and motionless.

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954) 1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

640

714
782
796
796
796
The poet now lures the "pagan" sar Ganyu, whose home is in a bamboo forest in the Metemma lowland of the eastern escarpment of Ethiopia.

Post: "Tall bamboo you (lit. he) will eat; bamboo you will devour;
Lord, named "Dammāna" (lit. cloud), from where you devour bamboo;
Ganyu, Ganyu, Ganyu, pure honey (flattering synonym for healer) /
dance ayaho, ayaho dance, Oh Ganyu!"

Thereupon one of the women devotees who has shaved a tonsure in the center of her skull ("Ganyu" comes from "ganye", meaning tonsure), which is the visible requirement he makes of those whom he "possesses", begins to rise. The "gurri" she dances differs only in details from the one performed for the Galla sar spirits.

It is now 11:00 P.M. The various male sars expected on the program for the evening have now "descended". It is time for the female sars to begin making their descent, which is safe, now that many protective male sars are about.

794
796
781
Word is whispered around that a male and a female sar who "will bite" are about to attack some of the possessed. Everyone rises and crowds close to the wall, leaving the hearth and the center of the room free. Only Lady Salāntew seems unafraid. She calls out a warning to the foreigner, in her husky voice but in friendly tone, advising him to stand on the bench so as not to be bitten. "Aysāw" (be well, be of good courage, be of good cheer) she calls out to the foreigner, using the [124] polite address, and forgetting to use the familiar 2nd person singular feminine, which is her privilege.

[125]
This time the possession begins differently. Two women detach themselves from the frightened crowd almost simultaneously. Both

X 794
● 796
781 women cower on all fours, snarl at each other, snort like angry leopards, showing their teeth. They crouch like wildcats about to spring at each other, their faces turned to the ground, and eying each other only intermittently. A shallow, large clay dish filled with barley beer is set on the floor for them, and the two antagonists compete with each other in lapping up the drink like cats.

One of the women is possessed by an evil female zar, the other by a mean male zar. The male zar snaps at the female zar, who is of equal power and status. Appearing stimulated by the drink, they chase each other about the room, still cowering, snorting, attacking, retreating, finally grasping each other in a battle clinch, and actually nipping at each other. When this happens, the Lady Salantu rises quickly, and descends into the arena wielding a thick leather strap. The contestants roll on and off one another and begin to bite seriously, but before damage is done, Lady Salantu swishes her strap, pulls them apart or separates them with light blows.

This battle is accompanied with drumbeat and rhythmic handclapping by the crowd. The contestants do not rejoin battle but roam very rapidly as if blind and lost, sniffing the ground as if they depended on the sense of smell, until they fall exhausted in a heap. But a few moments later they run to Lady Salantew, kiss her hand, and prostrate themselves before her on the dirt floor in front of the platform. Thus the female and minor zars pay homage to the powerful male zars that possess Lady Salantew, and acknowledge that they have learned to keep within bounds and not do very severe damage.

X 794
796
262 It is now 11:30 P.M. and a brief recess is announced. A young, part-Sudanese servant woman, and ex-slave, serves coffee, barley beer,

642

X 794
796
262
arak, and also round, solid wheat discs (Qitta)- the unleavened bread
of travelers, expensive when made of wheat.

X 794
781
[782]
About midnight, the convention proceeds, with the poet intoning
the call for the female zar "Shazqit (see table for her characteristics):

Post: "Dance, round and round, brave one;

Shazqit, we are calling; brave one".

Both men and women clap more fiercely than ever, in quick rhythm
Suddenly the servant woman who had served the latest refreshments
stiffens with a jerk, screams, and lets the tray slide from her hand.
She is about to be possessed by the female zar of her class and
occupation. This "gurri" is infantile in character. The young woman
begins to skip about the room like a young goat or an overly gay
little girl. She teasingly pokes at the men, again and again, until
a few copper coins are given her. When this happens, she jumps high
with glee. But a moment later she is back, pouting, demanding some
sweets, asking for honey. Given some, she devours it, and dances
a victory dance, flipping about on tiptoe. The drumbeat quickens.
Finally she falls exhausted, her zar now in full possession of her.

X 794
796
688
There is another hush, awaiting further demonstrations. But
there is an unscheduled interlude which reinforces discipline. The
woman who had danced the "pagan" gurri had left shortly afterward, ostensibly for a call of nature, but had not returned until now, far too long an absence without permission. Seeing her enter, Lady Salantew rises, shouting angrily, walks toward her and beats her on the upper back with the heavy strap, several times, rather hard. The victim stands with bowed head, not stirring under the punishment, evidently

X 794 realizing that her "zar" had insulted the powerful one of Salantew.
796
[689] Back on her throne, Lady Salantew harshly admonishes the audience for
dosing, for whispering, for laughing, and some for having taken food
and drink during the previous "gurri". This inattentiveness is an in-
sult to her zar, and she threatens to recess the convention if it
continues. But then she sugarcoats the threat by calling for another
round of refreshments.

[853] Some of the babies in the rear had cried, and were nursed by
their mothers. This had also been done by some of the possessed
women previously, sometimes within half an hour after the exhausting
"gurri". Motherhood and zar devotion evidently did not conflict.

[123] Lady Salantu used this intermission to send the foreigner word
promising "I shall appoint you a zar as your weqabi (protective
spirit)". When she saw that he had drunk some of the barley beer
which she had ordered to be served on the tablet of her zar. This
time she addressed him in the female gender again, just as she had
used a male gender in addressing her female devotees. The zars
are believed to enjoy playing their game of turning nature upside
down.

X 794 About 1A.M., everyone rose, except the poet and the drummer.
535
796 Fresh incense was heaped on the burners. Tired and partly intoxi-
cated members of the audience were shaken awake. For now they
were to witness the "fukkara", the individualistic "boasting dance"
of Lady Salantew's zar. It was a spastic bobbing up-and-down dance,
similar to the "hotu" dance of warriors. The drum beat faster and

[293] faster, Lady Salantew seemed to forget her dignity, but still waved
her strap, the symbol of her seniority, while the devotees shouted

X 794 "elli!" as shrilly as they do outside church during Coptic services.
535
796

Exhausted, the powerful woman finally collapsed, and the curtain was quickly drawn to hide her during her recovery.

X 794 Several other zar doctors demonstrated their individual "fukkara"
796 activities. But more and more participants grew inattentive, and some began to doze. Lady Salantew declared the session ended at about

[513] 3 A.M. The women bedded down right on the floor or the mud bench, while the men who lived nearby went home, and others rolled up in blankets and skins just outside the house, under the overhanging roof. It was a cold night, usual during cloudless month of Yakatit.

The season of the roaming zar spirits had once again been concluded, not to revive in full vigor until after the rainy season half a year later. At the convention much protection had been gained, and old protection reinforced against the many mischievous zars that might plague people in the meantime.

d) Social Aspects of the Zar Cult.

X 794 The groups of chronically possessed persons who meet regularly
608 as devotees of the zars, in the "wadaja" (lit. love feast), constitute what are called "aqwadaash" (sometimes "aqtacha"), face-to-face societies. Their interpersonal relationships soon become social, much like the māhabbār communal worship society of the church. Both establish bonds which, to the Amhara mind, become "artificial kinship". Not infrequently this leads to the establishment of bonds of actual affinal kinship (as described earlier).

X 794 The parallel can also be applied to an understanding of the
T12 leadership involved. Much like the māhabbār is led and blessed by the priest-confessor, so the zar society is led and blessed by the

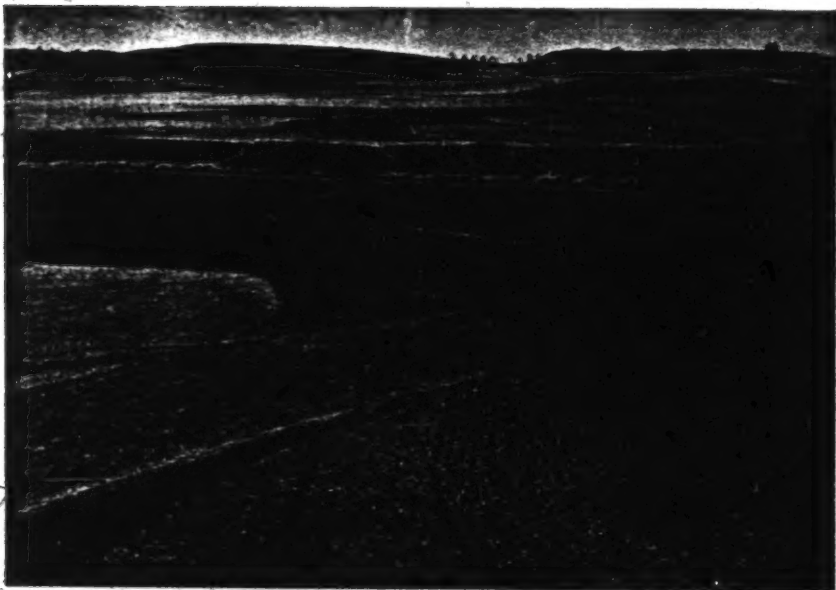
346 north-west of Zanjira near the upper margin of the sheet. The church clings to the side of a steep little hill which stands almost isolated among vast gorges and commands the grandest panorama imaginable of this tormented country. The hill is joined to Zanjira by a narrow causeway little lower than the general plateau, flat on top and dropping away in cliffs on either side, so regular that it almost seems artificial. Harris records a saying which evidently refers to this place: "from Iteghe you can see the Echege" (i.e. the chief of the monks, who then lived in Gondar). To be sure, one does seem to overlook a great part of the world from this point of vantage.

787 Every church is the centre of a radiating system of small paths (not shown on the map) chiefly used by people coming to service. There are of course regular Sunday services, but these are not very well attended. More important are the special festivals observed on certain dates of the Ethiopian month, which may fall on any day of the week. In this area the monthly festivals universally observed, on which no work could be done, were those of St. Michael, St. Mary, and St. George, on the 12th, 21st, and 23rd respectively, as well as "Bal Wold," a commemoration of the Birth of Christ, on the 29th of each month. Of still greater significance in the life of the people are the annual festivals, falling on the same day of the month as the monthly ones but in certain months only. On these annual festivals nearly the whole population makes its way to the churches dedicated to the particular saint commemorated. Often they will visit the local *tebel* or Holy Water and bathe there early in the morning before service. Going on to the church, all remain outside, for there would be no room for such a crowd within the cramped passages of the church itself. In the middle of the morning the *tabot* or ark is brought out and ceremonial dances held before it. Finally, before the service ends, it will be carried three times round the church in procession, attended by magnificent crosses and gaudy umbrellas. These are occasions of great popular excitement and rejoicing, and the congregations are often enormous. The long service over, they break up into gossiping groups, and go back to social lunches in each other's huts.

771 Enough has been said to show how large a part is played among these people by the Church and its priesthood. The country has indeed been described as priest-ridden, the people as over-dominated or even enslaved by the Church. If so, this servitude, at least in the country, is still a willing and unquestioned one. It is also true to say that without the Church the social structure of this countryside would fall to pieces, and life would lose not only its coherence but nearly all its variety and colour.

346 It was mentioned above that, to meet the needs of an increasing plateau population, several new churches had been founded in recent times in the area covered by the map. Two of these were established by "division" of a church which already existed in the gorge. Each original church had two *tabots* one of which was removed for the new foundation, for no church can exist without a *tabot* or altar-slab, this being the only part of the church which is consecrated. Thus the Mariam of the Tallak Amba plateau was derived from the Mariam half-way down the cliff about a mile to the north-east; and similarly a new Ghiorghis of the plateau, just east of Daloti, from the Ghiorghis in the gorge below. Of these "divisions," both of which took place

133
312



Irrigated land, Atakilt

291
481
796



*The ceremony of Timkat (Epiphany), near Debra Berhan
[Facing p. 171]*

shortly before the Italian invasion of 1935, the first was accomplished peacefully; but not the second. According to the story told me, the *tabot* of the lower Ghiorghis had been borrowed and carried in solemn procession on the plateau in order to ward off a swarm of locusts which were damaging the crops there. This measure was successful, and the plateau people determined to keep the *tabot* which had proved itself so powerful. The people of the gorge would not agree, and tried to recapture their *tabot*. The plateau party however successfully defended it by force of arms, and later built a little church to house it. It was not unusual to attribute specific powers to *tabots*: for instance, that of Dimbaro Mariam (a little east of the north-east corner of the sheet) used to be carried to war by the emperors, attended by a retinue of priests and scribes, to bring success in battle. [789]

The last church to be founded in these parts was the new St. Gabriel, on a prominent hill-top in the district of Dilila near the south-east corner of the sheet. I came upon it when first following the upper course of the Beressa in December 1946. As I approached the foot of the hill I learnt from passers-by that a new church had been built upon it, and that the foundress herself, a certain great lady from Addis Ababa, was at that moment on the hill. Climbing a rocky track to the top, I saw a cluster of new huts and the still unfinished building of the church. Nearby was a large canvas awning stretched rather clumsily between rough stone walls. Under the awning I found the lady herself, short and stout and genial, sitting on a camp chair; around her, squatting on the ground, was a deferential assembly of local dignitaries, personal retainers and priests. After the fluster caused by my unexpected arrival had died down, I had a talk with the worthy lady who, having just presided at a mid-day meal, now plied me with very welcome refreshment. She had been born and bred in this very place. Having spent most of her life elsewhere, and somehow acquired a certain amount of wealth, she had returned in later life to her place of birth and founded this church only the year before my visit. It met a need, she said, for the area lacked a church, and no other St. Gabriel existed anywhere in the neighbourhood. As it chanced, I had come on the day after St. Gabriel's annual festival (which is the 19th of Tahissas, or, in European style, the 28th of December). She expressed great regret that I had not been present at the festival itself, when big crowds had come from Debra Berhan and from all the surrounding country. [346]

This incident seemed to me interesting as demonstrating the tenacity of the local religious tradition in Ethiopia. After all the upheaval and disruption of Italian occupation and the Second World War, the hold of the ancient Church over the Amhara people seemed unweakened. The Church was able to extend its influence in an area not yet well served as readily as ever. It was still an appropriate act for a pious person to found a new church in a lonely place. Perhaps these things are not surprising, for the Church has been the main support and inspiration of Ethiopian unity since the earliest Christian times. It has always been the focal centre of the national sentiment, the fount of renewed resistance to aggression, the main force, in fact, which has maintained Ethiopia's independence and made of it, as Menelik himself once said, an island of Christianity in the great Islamic sea. [796]

346 very well closed; all appears to be vaulted. The church has a chancel and a transept, in the centre transept are curtains from end to end; and there are other curtains before the side doors, from wall to wall. They are curtains of silk: the entrance through these curtains is in three places, they are open in the middle, and they reach one to another, also they can be entered close to the walls. In the said three entrances there are little bells suspended to the curtains themselves, and nobody can enter by any part without these bells ringing. Here there is not more than one altar, which is in the chancel: this has a stand on four props, and the altar reaches to these four props. This stand is covered over above as though with a vault, and there is an altar stone which they call *tabuto*. Upon this altar stone there is a basin of copper, very large and flat below, and with low sides. This basin also reaches to the supports of the stand, which are disposed in a square. Within this large basin there is another smaller one. This stand has curtains hanging down from it to the ground, that is, at the back and sides, which screen the altar, except that in front it is open. One can go all round the altar. The bells are of stone, and in this manner: long thin stones, suspended by cords passed through them, and they strike them with sticks made for the purpose, and they make a sound as of cracked bells heard at a distance. Also at festivals they take the basins from the altar and strike them with sticks, and they help to make a sound. They have also other iron bells, not round, but with two sides, they have a clapper which strikes first on one side and then on the other, and it makes a noise as of helving a mattock. They also have other small ill-made bells, which they carry in their hands at processions, and they ring the whole of them at the festivals. On other days the bells of stones and iron are used. In all churches and monasteries they ring for matins 782
796 two hours before dawn. They say the prayers by heart and

CHURCH SERVICES.

23

without light, except ^{They say the prayers by heart and} in the lamps or chandeliers, for they have not got lamps. They burn butter in these chandeliers, for they have not got oil. They pray or chaunt very loud, without art of singing, and they do not recite (alternate) verses, but all sing straight on. Their prayers are psalms, and on feast days besides psalms they recite prose, according as the feast is so is the prose. They always stand in the churches; at matins they only say one single lesson: this is said by a priest or a friar, rather shouted than intoned, and he reads this lesson before the principal entrance. When this lesson is finished, on Saturdays, Sundays, and feast days, they make a procession with four or five crosses on their poles, and a cross not so much raised as carried like a stick in the left hand, because they carry a thurible in the right hand, since as many as carry a cross carry a thurible, there are always as many thuribles as crosses. They wear some silk cloaks, not well made, because they are not wider than the width of a piece of damask, or other silk from top to bottom. Before the breast, a cross piece to the flanks on each side, of any other stuff and of any colour, even though it should not match the principal part, and of this principal part a good ell hangs behind dragging on the ground. They make this procession through the circuit, which is like a cloister. This being ended, on the said Saturdays, Sundays, and feasts, he who has to say mass enters with two others into the chancel; they bring out an effigy of Our Lady, which they have in ancient pictures in all churches and monasteries. He who has to say mass places himself in the centre of the transept with his face towards the principal entrance, and the image in his hands held before his breast: and those who stand by his sides hold lighted candles in their hands, and all the others commence a chaunt like prose, and all walk, shouting and leaping as if dancing¹, they hold hands and go round, before the

¹ Como em chacota, dancing and singing, i.e., not reverentially.

- 796 image,¹ and at the sound of that chaunt or prose which they sing, they also ring the little bells and sound the cymbals to the same tune. Each time that they pass before the image they make a great reverence to it. Certainly it has a good appearance and causes devotion, from being a thing done for the praise of the Lord God. There also proceed crosses and thuribles in this feast as in the procession. When this is ended, 796 which lasts a good while, they put by the picture and go to 782 a small building which is on the North side, and of the gospel according to our mass; and outside the covered circuit, where they make the bread which they call *corbom*, and we *hostia*. They carry cross, thurible, and bell, and bring thence the bread of wheat, flour, and without leaven, made at that moment, very white and nice, of the size and roundness of a patena, in this monastery in which are few people. In other monasteries and churches, where there are many people, they make large loaves, and many of them according to the people, because all are communicants who go to the church. According to the width of the bread they make its thickness, from half a finger's breadth to an inch, or larger. They bring this loaf in a small vase, which is one of those of the altar, covered with a cloth, and with the cross and thurible, sounding a bell. Behind the church, that is, behind the chancel,² in that circuit which is like a cloister, nobody must remain unless he were in holy orders, and all the others must be before the principal entrance in another large circuit, which all the churches have; for near this, which is like a cloister, anybody who likes may stand. Whilst bringing the bread, as many as are in the church or in its circuit, when they hear the bell, bow their heads until the bell is silent, which is when they place the wafer on the altar with the small vase in which they brought

¹ *Como quem anda per mãos diante da imagem.* According to the Spanish translation of Miguel de Salves. Saragoessa, 1561.

² *Oussia.*

it. They place this vase in the other larger one, and cover the bread with a dark cloth, after the fashion of a *corporale*. They have a silver chalice in this monastery, and so in all honourable churches and monasteries there are silver chalices, some have them of gold: in poor churches, which they call churches of *Balques*, that is, of rustics, there are copper chalices. The vases are very wide and ill made, and they have not got patenas. They put into the chalice wine of raisins, in large quantities, because as many as partake of the communion of the body also partake of the blood. He who has to say mass begins it with Hallelujah in a loud voice, rather shouted than sung; all respond and continue the chaunt. He of the mass is silent and continues his benedictions, which he does with his small cross, which he holds in his hand. Those who are outside sing as well as those who are inside the church and cloister, up to a certain distance. Here one of those who is at the altar, takes a book and goes to read the epistle at the principal door of the church. When it is ended, he who read it at once begins a chaunt as a response; those who are at the altar, or in the church, follow him. This ended, he who says the mass takes a book from the altar, and gives it to him who has to read the gospel, and he bows his head and begs a blessing. After he has received it he goes to the place where the epistle was read, and with him two others, one with a cross and thurible, the other with a bell. They read the gospel, and likewise the epistle, fast and loud, as much so as the tongue can speak and the voice be raised. Returning to the altar, on the way another chaunt commences, and those that accompany them join in it. On reaching the altar they give the book to kiss to him who says the mass, and they deposit the book in its place; because at the altar they say nothing from a book. Then he who says mass takes the thurible, or they give it into his hand, and he incenses the altar above it, and then takes

196 several turns round it, giving incense. When these circuits
182 and incensing are ended, he turns to the altar and gives
many blessings with the cross, and then uncovers the bread
which was covered up, and which is for the sacrament: they
take it with both hands, and let go the right hand and it
remains in the left hand: with the thumb of the right hand
he makes five marks like little hollows, that is to say, one
in the upper part, one in the middle, another at the lower
part, another on the left, and another on the right hand,
and then he consecrates in his language, and with our own
very words, and does not elevate it. He does as much with
the chalice, and says over it our own very words, in his
language: and again covers it, and takes the sacrament of
the bread in his hands and divides it in the middle, and of
the part which remains in his left hand, from the top of it
he takes a very small portion, and places the other pieces
one upon another. The priest takes this small portion for
himself, and also takes a portion of the sacrament of the
blood. After that he takes the vase with the sacrament
covered up and gives it to him who read the gospel, and
likewise takes the chalice with the sacrament and gives it
to him who read the epistle. He then administers the
communion to the priests who are near the altar, taking the
sacrament in very small portions from the vase which the
deacon holds in his right hand, and as often as he administers
it the sub-deacon takes of the blood with a spoon of gold,
or silver, or copper, according to the church, and gives a
very small quantity to the person who has received the
body. There is also on one side another priest with a ewer
of holy water, and the person who has received the com-
munion puts out the palm of his hand and he pours some of
that holy water, and with it he washes his mouth and
swallows it. This being done all go to the altar with this
sacrament before the first curtain, and in this manner they
give the communion to those that are there, and thence to

CHURCH SERVICES.

27

those who are at the other curtain, and thence to the 796
secular people who are at the principal door, both men and 782
women, if it is a church to which women come. At the
giving of the communion, and likewise at all the offices of
the church, all are standing up. When they come to
receive the communion, all come with their hands raised
before their shoulders, and the palms forward. As soon as
each one receives the sacrament of the blood he takes the
said water as has been said, and so generally as many as are
communicants. Before mass they wash their hands with
the water which is in all the churches and monasteries.
The priest who said the mass, and those who stood with him
at the altar, when the communion is ended, return to the
altar, and wash the vase in which the sacrament was, with
the water which remains in the ewer, which they say is
blessed, this water they pour into the chalice, and the priest
who said mass takes it all. This done, one of these ministers
of the altar takes a cross and a bell, and beginning a low
chaunt goes to the principal entrance, where the epistle and
gospel were read, and the administering the communion
ended, and as many as are in the church, and outside of
it, bow their heads, and go away in peace. They say this is
the blessing, without this no one goes away. On Saturdays
and Sundays, and feast days, in all the churches and
monasteries, blessed bread is distributed. The method
which they have in this small monastery, which will not [192]
have more than 20 or 25 friars, is that which is followed in
all the monasteries and churches, great and small. The
office of the mass, exclusive of the processions, is short;
and the mass on week days is quickly finished.

CHURCH SERVICES.

29

house are the raisins from which the wine is made, and a machine for pressing. In this same house the blessed bread is made which is given away on Saturdays and Sundays and feast days; and on great feasts, such as Christmas, Easter, Our Lady of August, etc., they carry this bread of the sacrament with a pallium,¹ bell, and cross devoutly. Before they enter the church with it they go round the church by the circuit like a cloister; when it is not a feast they enter the church at once and without the pallium. On a Saturday before Ascension these friars made a procession; and from being in a new country it seemed to us very good, and they did it in this way. They took crosses, and the altar stone covered with a silk cloth, a friar carried it on his head, which was also covered with the said cloths; and they carried books and bells, and thuribles, and holy water; and all went chaunting to some millet fields: there they made their devotions and cries after the fashion of litanies, and with this procession they returned to the monastery. We asked why they did that, and they said that the animals ate their millet, and so they went to pour out holy water and pray God to drive them out. In this country he that says the mass has no other difference from the deacon and sub-deacon in his vestments than a long stole with an opening in the middle to allow the head to pass through; before and behind it reaches to the ground. The friars say mass with hair on their heads; the priests do not wear hair, and are shaven and so say mass. Also, both friars and priests say mass barefooted, nobody enters the church with his feet shod, and they allege for this what God said to Moses: "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for thou art on holy ground."

¹ Under a canopy.

CAP. XIII.—*How in all the churches and monasteries in the country of Prester John only one mass is said each day; and of the situation of the monastery of Bisam where we buried Mattheus; and of the fast of Lent.*

796 In the monastery of St. Michael, where we were staying, we said mass each day, not in the monastery, but in the circuit which is like a cloister. In this country they do not say more than one mass in each church or monastery. The friars came to our mass with great devotion, as it appeared; and they supplied a thurible and incense, because we had not brought any with us, and they do not think mass is properly said without incense; and they said that they approved of all, except that we had only one priest to say mass; because among them not less than three, five, or or seven stand at the altar to say mass. They also were surprised at our coming into the church with our shoes on, and still more at our spitting in it. In this manner we said mass every day up to Trinity Sunday, and when we intended to say mass on the following Monday they did not allow us to say it, at which we were much scandalised and aggrieved, and it seemed to us that they had some evil suspicion of us, not knowing why they so acted. Later we learned how they preserved some things of the Old Law together with the New; such as that of the fast of Lent, which they began on Monday after Sexagesima Sunday, that is, ten days before the beginning of our Lent; and so they make fifty days of Lent. They say they take these days in anticipation for the Saturdays when they do not keep the fast. When they fast they eat at night, and because all fast they say mass at night, because all have to take the communion. Likewise, as they take fifty days' fast in Lent, so they take as many days after Easter which are not fast days. Then, when there is no fast, they say mass in the morning. This secret we did not know, and

784

CHURCH SERVICES.

(31

we had no one to explain it to us : as soon as their liberty not to fast had ended, their mass could not be said, except at night, and so they did not consent to our saying it; thus we felt aggrieved without cause. This time having ended and Trinity passed by, all priests and friars are obliged to fast every day except Saturdays and Sundays. They keep this fast up to Christmas Day, and as all fast they say mass at night. They allege for this the supper of Christ, when He consecrated His true Body, having been a fast time, and almost night. The general people, that is secular men and women, are obliged to fast from Trinity to Advent, Wednesdays and Fridays of each week, and from Christmas day to the Purification of Our Lady, which they call the feast of Simeon,¹ they have no fast. The first three days after the Purification, not being Saturday or Sunday, are great fast days for priests, friars, and laymen. They say that in these three days they do not eat more than once: it is called the penitence of Niniveh. At the end of these three days, up to the beginning of Lent, they again fast as from after Trinity. During Advent and the whole of Lent, priests, friars, lay friars, men and women, small and great, sound and sick, all fast. Thus from Easter to Trinity, and from Christmas to the Purification, they say mass in the morning, because there is no fast, and all the other time at night, because they are fasting. Where we buried Mattheus is a great and honourable monastery, which is named Bisam, and its patron, Jesus. From the monastery where we stayed to this is a league of very precipitous country. It is on a very high rock, and looking round all sides of it there appear like the depths of hell. The monastery house is very large in bulk, and larger in revenues, and this monastery is very well fitted. The fashion of this house is of three large and beautiful naves, with their arches and vaulted roofs. They appear to be of wood, and because all

¹ Synam.

792 thuribles of copper. When mass was said, I saw a great gold chalice and gold spoon, with which they administered the communion. Of the three hundred friars who came to this monastery, very few were those that I knew as belonging to it: and I asked some of my friends how it was, that with so large a number of friars in the monastery as they said, they were not present at such a feast. They told me that even though there were more than they had said, that they were scattered about in these monasteries and churches, and markets, to seek for their living, because that could not be in the monastery whilst they were young men; and when they were old men, and could not walk, they came to die in the monastery. On that day I saw the habit put on seventeen young men. There is a tomb in this

778 monastery which they say is of an Abba or provincial of

776 this monastery who is named Philip, and they give him the merits of a Saint, saying that there was a King Prester John who commanded that Saturday should not be observed in his kingdoms and lordships, and this Abba Philip went to that King Prester with his friars, and undertook to show how God had commanded that Saturday should be kept, and that whoever did not keep it should die by stoning, and that he would maintain this before all the fathers of Ethiopia: and he made it good before the King. Therefore

● 796 they say that he was a Saint for making Saturday to be

782 kept, and they treat him as a Saint, and they hold a feast for him every year, in the month of July, which they call *Castar* Philip, which means funeral or memorial of Philip.¹ On this account the people of this monastery are the most Judaizing of all the kingdoms of Prester John. I came twice to this *Castar* of Philip, at which they did me much honour, and they kill many cows at this feast. In one year they killed thirty, and in another year twenty-eight, and in

¹ *Castar* should be *Teskar*; Mansfield Parkyns calls it a sort of funeral feast, where charities are bestowed on the poor and the priests.

each of the years that I came there they gave me two ⁷⁹⁶ quarters of the fattest cow that was killed. This flesh is ⁷⁸² distributed amongst the people who come to the Castar, and the friars have none because they do not eat meat. And ^[84] these cows are all brought as offerings by their breeders in the district, who vow them to Philip. This monastery, and the others that are subject to it, have this rule in addition, that no females enter them, that is to say, neither women, nor she-mules, nor cows, nor hens, nor anything else that is female. And these cows which they kill are killed a long way from the wall, and when I came there they came to the distance of a cross-bow shot to take my mule, and they took her away to their farm of Jamgargara, where Mattheus died.

CAP. XV.—*Of the agriculture of this country, and how they preserve themselves from the wild beasts, and of the revenues of the monastery.*

The friars of this monastery, and of the other monasteries ²⁴¹ subject to it, might do good works by planting trees and ^[792] vines, and making gardens and orchards for their exercise; and they do nothing. The country is ready to produce everything, as is seen from that which is uncultivated: they do not plant or grow anything except millet and bee-hives. ^[231] When it is night, neither they nor anybody else go out from their houses from fear of the wild beasts that are in the country, and those who watch the millet have very high resting places upon the trees, in which they sleep at night. In the district of this monastery there are, in the valleys ²³¹ between the mountains, very large herds of cows, kept by ⁵⁶³ Arab Moors, and there go with each herd forty or fifty Moors, with their wives and children: and their headman is

574 middle upwards hairy like lions. We passed the mountain,
 and went to sleep at the foot of a village called Zalote.
 There will be about four or five leagues from this place to
 the monastery from which we set out. We halted by a
 running river of very good water, and when our baggage
 had been unloaded we went to the said village to see a very
 honourable gentleman, the headman of it—a very old man,
 who was lodged here very honourably. He gave us a very
 [262] hospitable reception, giving us many fowls cooked in butter,
 and much mead, and he sent us a very large fat cow to
 the place of our halt. On the following day, which was
 Sunday, we went to say our mass at the church of the
 village, which is called St. Michael, a poor church, both the
 fabric and the ornaments. There are in this church three
 793 married priests and three others, deacons,¹ that is to say, of
 ● 796 the gospel, and all are necessary, for no less can say mass.
 This honourable captain I met with later as a friar in the
 monastery of Bisan, and he left his condition and revenues
 to his sons, who were honourable persons; and I saw him
 stand at the gate outside, and he did not enter within the
 monastery, and there he received the communion with the
 novices, and when the offices of the church were ended he
 remained in honour with the provincial. On this Sunday
 133 we set out again in the afternoon, because the country
 people who conducted us wished it so. Here we began to
 travel through flat country fallows and tillage, in the fashion
 of Portugal, and the bushes which are between the tilled
 lands are all wild olives, without other trees. We slept by
 some running streams, between many good villages.

¹ *Zagonaes*. Ethiopian corruption of *diacones*.

346 other women do in the church of the apostles, who take it
 562 in its place. I always saw the women of the Barnagais go
 [644] to the women's church to take the communion with the
 other women, and I did not see them use the privilege
 which they say they have, of taking the communion, with
 one damsel, in the church of the men. The circuits of the
 churchyards join to one another; they are of very high
 walls. They make the sacramental bread for both churches
 in one building, and they say the masses in both churches
 at the same time, and the priests who serve in one church
 serve also in the other; that is two thirds of the priests
 in the men's church, and one third in the women's church,
 and so they are distributed. These churches have not got
 tithes, but they have got much land belonging to the priests,
 and they put it out to profit and divide the revenues of the
 lands among themselves: the Barnagais gives what is
 necessary to the churches, such as ornaments, wax, butter,
 incense in sufficient quantity, and he supplies them with
 [792] everything. There may be in these churches twenty priests
 and always twenty-two friars. I never saw a church of
 priests which had not got friars, nor a monastery of friars
 which had got priests; because the friars are so nu-
 merous that they cover the world, both in the monasteries
 as also in the churches, roads, and markets: they are in
 every place.

CAP. XXVI.—*How the priests are, and how they are ordained,
 and of the reverence which they pay to the churches and
 their churchyards.*

793
 684 The priests are married to one wife, and they observe the
 587 law of matrimony better than the laity: they live in their
 houses with their wives and children. If their wife should
 die they do not marry again; neither can the wife, but she

CHURCH AT BARRA.

61

an ouquia. This Barnagais forbade the people in his country having any other weights except his own, and they had to ask the Barnagais or his factors for the weights whenever they had to sell or receive gold, so that he had knowledge of what was in the country, and he takes it when he pleases, according to what his country people say, who must know it well. 496

CAP. XXIX.—*Of the church of the town of Barra, and its ornaments, and of the fair there, and of the merchandise, and costumes of the friars, nuns, and priests.*

In this town of Barra there is a church of Our Lady, large, new, very well painted and well built, and handsomely ornamented with many brocades, crimson silks, and Mekkah velvets, and red camlets. The church in this town is served like that at Barua, only that the offices are more solemnized because the Barnagais resides here, and because here there are more clergy and an infinite number of friars. The church is managed by priests. I saw them make a procession round the church in the greater circuit, which is of the churchyard. In it there were many priests, friars, and men and women, because in this church the women receive the communion in the place where the laity do so. In that procession I saw the ornaments which I have mentioned: they must have taken quite thirty turns round the church chaunting like a litany, and sounding many drums and cymbals, as they sound them when they make a procession before the effigy of Our Lady on Sundays and feast days; and they sing and celebrate a feast; and likewise when they give the communion on feast days. They said that this procession was made in supplication to God for rain for their sowing. The bells are of stone, like those of other churches, and the bells badly made. In this town there is a great fair like that of Barua, and so likewise in all the 346 796 ● 443

404 ANSWERS TO ARCHBISHOP OF BRAGA'S QUESTIONS.

136 is no fish there except very little from the rivers; from the sea none. ^{There}

795 There are no monasteries except of St. Anthony, and
792 not of any other order, as some friars say who come from there.

291 The gentlemen, monks, canons, and priests are clothed; most of the other people are bare from the waist upwards, and a sheepskin on the shoulders, with the front and hind feet tied together.

792 Most of the monasteries are situated on high mountains,
346 or in great ravines; they have large revenues and jurisdiction. In many monasteries they do not eat meat all the
[262] year, and fish very few times, as they have not go it in the country. The services of these monasteries are psalms and prose, and so it is done in the churches of the canons.

● 796 Every church has two curtains, one on this side of the altar with little bells, and no one but priests enter inside this curtain; and another curtain in the middle of the church. And no one but persons in orders enter the church, and many gentlemen and honourable persons are ordained in order to enter the church. They go to the door of all the churches and monasteries to read the epistles and gospels, and they say them rapidly, and there they give the communion to the people.

The priests consecrate at the altar, and do not show the sacrament. When the priest who says mass comes to take the communion, he takes a particle from the top, and the other two large parts he leaves for the communion of the people. All the people who come to the church have to receive the communion every day, or else not come to church. When the communion is ended, they give them a little blessed water with which they wash their mouths.

Nobody sits down in the church, nor do they enter it shod; they do not hem or spit, nor do they let any dog or other animal come into the church. They confess standing,

and so receive absolution. They pray in the churches of 796 ●
the canons as in those of the friars. Friars do not marry, [182]
canons and priests do so. When the canons live together 793
in the circuit they eat in their houses, and the friars eat in
community. The chiefs of these churches are called Lica-
canate. The wives of the canons have houses outside of the
circuit, where they go to live with them: the son of a
canon remains a canon, and the son of a priest not, except
he chooses later to become one. No tithes are paid to any
church, they live on the large properties which the churches
and monasteries possess. Complaints against the clergy [694]
are dealt with before the secular justice.

The vestment is made like a shirt, and the stole with a 292
hole in the middle, and put over the head; they have no
maniple, nor amice, nor girdle; priests and friars all have [302]
their heads shaved, and the beards not. The friars say
mass with their hats on their heads, and the priests with
their heads bare.

In no church is more than one mass said, and no mass is 794
said for alms, not even for the dead. When any person dies,
the priests come with cross and holy water and incense,
and recite certain prayers for him, and carry him off to
burial very hurriedly: next day they bring offerings: the
churchyards are all closed, so that nothing can enter them.

Prester John has no determined place of abode, he 643
always goes about the country in tents, and he will always
have in his camp five or six tents among good and common
ones: and there will always be at Court of people for the 644
horses and mules from fifty thousand upwards.

The kitchen of Prester John is a good crossbow shot
behind his quarters, and they bring his food in this manner:
all that he has to eat comes in porringers and dishes of
very black earthenware on wooden trays, and pages bring
them, and above the pages come a pallium of silk, which
covers them so that these viands come with reverence.

they take what they have, and they do not choose to provide more than what they require and is necessary for them. 554

In no part that he went about in were there butchers' shops, except at the Court, and no person of the common people may kill a cow (even though it is his own) without leave from the lord of the country. 253

The people speak the truth little, even when they make oath, unless they swear by the head of the King. They much fear excommunication, and if they are ordered to do something, and that it be to their prejudice, they do it from fear of excommunication. 695 (688)

The oath is administered in this manner. They go to the door of the church with two priests, and they have there incense and embers, and he who has to swear puts his hands upon the church door, and one the priests tells him of the oath to speak the truth, and that if he speaks falsely, that as the lion swallows his prey in the woods, so may his soul be swallowed by the devil; and as the wheat is broken between the stones, so may his bones be ground by the devils; and he who swears, at each thing answers Amen; and as the fire burns wood, so may your soul be burned in the fire of hell and made dust. He says Amen. And this if you do not speak truth; he says Amen. And if you speak truth, may your life be prolonged with honour, and your soul in paradise with the blest. He says Amen. And this ended, he gives his testimony.

He says that the movable feasts, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, are celebrated on the same days and seasons that we celebrate them. The birth of Christ, Circumcision, Epiphany, and other feasts of saints also agree with us, and others not. The year and months begin on the 29th day of August, on which was the beheading of St. John, and the year is of twelve months, and the month of thirty days. When the year is ended, there are five days over, which they call pagomen, which means fulfilment of the year, and in the bissextile year there are six days over; so they keep with us. 796 805

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804

MP5 Amhara MP5

THE SOURCE OF THE NILE.

11

I shall take notice of only one instance in many, because it has been insisted upon by both parties with unusual vehemence, and very little candour. 779

It was settled by the first general council, that one baptism only was necessary for the regeneration of man, for freeing him from the sin of our first parents, and listing him under the banner of Christ; "I confess one baptism for the remissions of sins," says the Symbol. Now, it was maintained by the Jesuits, that in Abyssinia, once every year, they baptized all grown people, or adults. I shall, as briefly as possible, set down what I myself saw while on the spot. 783 796●

The small river, running between the town of Adowa and the church, had been dammed up for several days; the stream was scanty, so that it scarcely overflowed. It was in some places three feet deep, in some, perhaps, four, or little more. Three large tents were pitched the morning before the feast of the Epiphany; one, on the north, for the priests to repose in during intervals of the service, and, besides this, one to communicate in: on the south there was a third tent for the monks and priests of another church to rest themselves in their turn. About twelve clock at night the monks and priests met together, and began their prayers and psalms at the water-side, one party relieving each other. At dawn of day the governor, Welleta Michael, came hither with some soldiers to raise men for Ras Michael, then on his march against Waragna Fasil, and sat down on a small hill by the water-side, the troops all skirmishing on foot and on horseback around them.

As soon as the sun began to appear, three large crosses of wood were carried by three priests dressed in their sacerdotal vestments, and who, coming to the side of the river, dip the cross into the water, and all this time the firing, skirmishing, and praying, went on to-

783 gether. The priests with the crosses returned, one
 796 of their number before them carrying something less
 than an English quart of water in a silver cup, or chalice; when they were about fifty yards from Welleta Michael, that general stood up, and the priest took as much water as he could hold in his hand, and sprinkled it upon his head, holding the cup at the same time to Welleta Michael's mouth to taste; after which the priest received it back again, saying, at the same time, "Gzier ybarak," which is simply, "May God bless you." Each of the three crosses was then brought forward to Welleta Michael, and he kissed them. The ceremony of sprinkling the water was then repeated to all the great men in the tent, all cleanly dressed as in gala. Some of them, not contented with aspersion, received the water in the palms of their hands joined, and drank it there; more water was brought for those that had not partaken of the first; and, after the whole of the governor's company was sprinkled, the crosses returned to the river, their bearers singing hallelujahs; and the skirmishing and firing continuing.

Janni, my Greek friend, had recommended me to the priest of Adowa; and, as the governor had placed me by him, I had an opportunity, for both these reasons, of being served among the first. My friend, the priest, sprinkled water upon my head, and gave me his blessing in the same words he had used to the others; but, as I saw it was not necessary to drink, I declined putting the cup to my lips, for two reasons; one, because I knew the Abyssinians have a scruple to eat or drink after strangers; the other, because I apprehended the water was not perfectly clean; for no sooner had the crosses first touched the pool, and the cup filled from the clean part for the governor, than two or three hundred boys, calling themselves *deacons*,

plunged in with only a white cloth, or rag, tied round⁷⁸³ their middle ; in all other respects they were perfectly^{796●} naked. All their friends and relations (indeed everybody) went close down to the edge of the pool, where water was thrown upon them, at first decently enough, by boys of the town, and those brought on purpose as deacons ; but, after the better sort of people had received the aspersion, the whole was turned into a riot, the boys, muddying the water, threw it round them upon every one they saw well-dressed or clean. The governor retreated first, then the monks, and then the crosses, and left the brook in possession of the boys and blackguards, who rioted there till two o'clock in the afternoon.

I must, however, observe, that, a very little time after the governor had been sprinkled, two horses and two mules, belonging to Ras Michael and Ozoro Esther, came and were washed. Afterwards the soldiers went in and bathed their horses and guns ; those who had wounds bathed them also. I saw no women in the bath uncovered, even to the knee ; nor did I see any person of the rank of decent servants go into the water at all, except with the horses. Heaps of platters and pots, that had been used by Mahometans or Jews, were brought thither likewise to be purified ; and thus the whole ended.

I saw this ceremony performed afterwards at Kahha, near Gondar, in presence of the king, who drank some of the water, and was sprinkled by the priests ; then took the cup in his hand, and threw the rest that was left upon Amha Yasous *, saying, " I will be your deacon ;" and this was thought a high compli-

* Prince of Shoa, often spoken of in the sequel.

783 ment, the priest giving him his blessing at the same
 796 time, but offering him no more water.

I shall now state, in his own words, the account given of this by Alvarez, chaplain to the Portuguese embassy, under Don Roderigo de Lima.

The king had invited Don Roderigo de Lima, the Portuguese ambassador, to be present at the celebration of the festival of the Epiphany. They went about a mile and a half from their former station, and encamped upon the side of a pond, which had been prepared for the occasion. Alvarez says, that, in their way, they were often asked by those they met or overtook, "Whether or not they were going to be baptized?" to which the chaplain and his company answered in the negative, as having been already once baptized in their childhood.

"In the night," says he, "a great number of priests assembled about the pond, roaring and singing with a view of blessing the water. After midnight the baptism began. The Abuna Mark, the king and queen, were the first that went into the lake; they had each a piece of cotton cloth about their middle, which was just so much more than the rest of the people had. At the sun-rising the baptism was most thronged; after which, when Alvarez * came, the lake was full of holy water, into which they had poured oil."

It should seem, from this outset of his narrative, that he was not at the lake till the ceremony was half over, and did not see the benediction of the water at all, nor the curious exhibition of the King, Queen, and Abuna, and their cotton cloths. As for the circumstance of the oil being poured into the water, I

* Vide Alvarez's narrative in his account of the embassy of Don Roderigo de Lima, page 155.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804

MP5 Amhara MP5

THE SOURCE OF THE NILE.

15

will not positively contradict it; for, though I was 783
early there, it might have escaped me if it was done 796
in the dark. However, I never heard it mentioned
as part of the ceremony; and it is probable I should,
if any such thing was really practised; neither was I
in time to have seen it at Kahha.

"Before the pond a scaffold was built, covered
round with planks, within which sat the king, looking
towards the pond, his face covered with blue taffeta,
while an old man, who was the king's tutor, was
standing in the water up to the shoulders, naked as
he was born, and half dead with cold, for it had fro-
zen violently in the night. All those that came near
him he took by the head and plunged them in the wa-
ter, whether men or women, saying, in his own lan-
guage, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, Son,
and Holy Ghost."

Now Shoa, where the king was then, is in lat. 8° N.
and the sun was in 22° south declination, advancing
northward, so the sun was, on the day of the Epi-
phany, within 30° of the zenith of the bathing-place.
The thermometer of Fahrenheit rises at Gondar about [32]
that time to 68° , so in Shoa it cannot rise to less than
 70° , for Gondar is in lat. 12° N. that is 4° farther
northward, so it is not possible water should freeze,
nor did I ever see ice in Abyssinia, not even on the
highest or coldest mountains. January is one of the
hottest months in the year, day and night the sky is
perfectly serene, nor is there a long disproportioned
winter night. At Shoa the days are equal to the
nights, at least as to sense, even in the month of Ja-
nuary.

The baptism, Alvarez says, began at midnight, and
the old tutor dipt every person under water, taking
him by the head, saying, "I baptize thee in the name

783 of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."
 796 It was most thronged at sun-rise, and ended about
 nine o'clock; a long time for an old man to stand in
 frozen water.

The number (as women were promiscuously admitted) could not be less than 40,000; so that even the nine hours this baptist-general officiated, he must have had exercise enough to keep him warm, if 40,000 (many of them naked beauties) passed through his hands.

The women were stark naked before the men, not even the rag about them. Without such a proper medium as frozen water, I fear it would not have contributed much to the interests of religion to have trusted a priest (even an old one) among so many bold and naked beauties, especially as he had the first six hours of them in the dark.

783 The Abuna, the king, and queen, were the three
 796 first baptized, all three being absolutely naked, having
 291 only a cotton cloth round their middle. I am sure
 831 there never could be a greater deviation from the manners of any kingdom, than this is from those of Abyssinia. The king is always covered; you seldom see any part of him but his eyes. The queen and every woman in Abyssinia, in public and private, (I mean where nothing is intended but conversation) are covered to the chin. It is a disgrace to them to have even their feet seen by strangers; and their arms and hands are concealed even to their nails. A curious circumstance, therefore, it would have been for the king to be so liberal of his queen's charms, while he covers his own face with blue taffeta; but to imagine that the Abuna, a Coptish monk, bred in the desert of St Macarius, would expose himself naked among naked women, contrary to the usual custom of the celebration he observes in his own church, is monstrous, and

must exceed all belief whatever. As the Abuna ⁷⁸³ Mark too was of the reasonable age of 110 years, ⁷⁹⁶ he might, I think, have dispensed at that time of [29] life with a bathing gown, especially as it was frost. [33]

The old man in the pond repeated the formula, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," in his own language; and Alvarez, it is plain, understood not one word of Abyssinian. Yet, on the other hand, he speaks Latin to the king, who wonderfully understands him, and answers as decisively on the merits of the dispute as if he had been educated in the Sorbonne. "Confiteor unum baptizma," says Alvarez *, was a constitution of the Nicene council under Pope Leo. Right, says the king, whose church, however, anathematized Leo and the council he presided at; which both the king and Alvarez should have known was not the Nicene council, though the words of the symbol quoted are thought to be part of a confession framed by that assembly.

"Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit," says Alvarez. "You say right," answers the king, "as to baptism; these are the words of our Saviour; but this present ceremony was lately invented by a grandfather of mine, in favour of such as have turned Moors, and are desirous again of becoming Christians."

I should think, in the first place, this answer of the king should have let Alvarez see no baptism was intended there; or, if it was a re-baptism, it only took place in favour of those who had turned Moors, and must therefore have been but partial. If this was really the case, what had the king, queen, and Abuna,

* Vid. Alvarez, hoc loco. Ramusio. Viaggi. p. 254.

783 to do in it? Sure they had neither apostatized, nor
 ● 796 was the company of apostates a very creditable society
 for them.

Alvarez, to persuade us this is real baptism, says that oil was thrown into the pond before he came. He will not charge himself with having seen this, and it is probably a falsehood. But he knew it was an essential in baptism in all the churches in the East; so indeed is salt, which he should have said was here used likewise: then he would have had all the materials of Greek baptism; and this salt might have contributed to cooling the water, that had frozen under the rays of a burning sun.

Alvarez must have seen, that not only men and women go to be washed in the pool, but horses, cows, mules, and a prodigious number of asses. Are these baptised? I would wish to know the formula the reverend baptist-general used on their occasion.

There is but one church where I ever saw sacred rites, or something like baptism, conferred upon asses; it is, I think, at Rome, on St Andrew's or St Patrick's day. It should be St Balaam's, if he was in the Roman kalender as high as he is in the Abyssinian. In that church (it is, I think, on Monte Cavallo) all sorts of asses, about and within Rome, are gathered together, and showers of holy water and blessings rained by a priest upon them. What is the formula I do not know; although it is a joke put upon strangers, especially of one nation, to assemble them there; or whether the two churches of Rome and Abyssinia differ so much in this as in other points of discipline, I am not informed; but the rationality and decency of such a ceremony being the same in all churches, the service performed at the time should be the same likewise.

I will not then have any scruple to say, that this whole account of Alvarez is a gross fiction; that no baptism, or any thing like baptism, is meant by the ceremony; that a man is no more baptised by keeping the anniversary of our Saviour's baptism, than he is crucified by keeping his crucifixion. The commemoration of our Saviour's baptism on the epiphany, and the blessing the waters that day, is an old observance of the eastern church, formerly performed in public in Egypt, as now in Ethiopia. Since that of Alexandria fell into the hands of Mahometans, the fear of insult and profanation has obliged them to confine this ceremony, and all other processions, within the walls of their churches, in each of which there is constantly a place devoted to this use. Those that cannot attend the ceremony of aspersion in the church, especially sick or infirm people, have the water sent to them, and a large contribution is made for the patriarch, or bishop; yet nobody ever took it into their heads to tax either Greek or Armenian with a repetition of baptism.

Monsieur de Tournefort *, in his travels through the Levant, gives you a figure of the Greek priest, who blesses the water in a peculiar habit, with a pastoral staff in his hand.

But, besides this, various falsehoods have likewise been propagated about the manner of baptism practised in Abyssinia; all in order to impugn the validity of it, and to excuse the rash conduct of the Jesuits for re-baptising all the Abyssinians, as if they had been a Jewish and Pagan people that never had been baptised at all. The violation of this article of the creed, or confession of Nice, was a cause of great offence to the

* Tournef. tom. i. p. 111.

783 Abyssinians, and of the misfortunes that happened
 afterwards. The whole of the Abyssinian service of
 ●796 baptism is in their liturgy. The Jesuits had plenty of
 copies in their hands, and could have pointed out the
 part of the service that was heretical, if they had
 pleased; they did not pretend, however, to do this,
 and their silence condemns them.

As for the idle stories that are told of the words
 pronounced, such as,—“I baptise you in the name
 of the Holy Trinity,”—“In the name of Peter and
 Paul,”—“I baptise you in the water of Jordan,”
 —“May God baptise you,”—“May God wash
 you,” and many others, they are all invented by
 the Jesuits, to excuse the repetition of baptism in Abys-
 sinia, which there was no sort of occasion for, as they
 might have examined the words and form in the
 liturgies, which are in every church; and I must
 here only observe, that if, as the chaplain Alvarez
 says, the priest in the pool, on the festival of the Epi-
 phany, was so fond of the proper words, as even at that
 time, to say “I baptise you in the name of the Father,
 of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” the words he
 quotes to shew that this immersion in water on the
 Epiphany is a real baptism, I cannot comprehend
 why they should vary them to other words, when
 nothing but baptism is meant. But this I can bear
 evidence of, that, in no time when I was present,
 as I have above a hundred times been, at the baptism
 both of adults and infants, aye, and of apostates
 too, I never heard other words pronounced than the
 orthodox baptismal ones, “I baptise thee in the name
 of “the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,”
 immersing the child in pure water, into which they
 first pour a small quantity of oil of olives, in the form
 of a cross.

The Abyssinians receive the holy sacrament in both kinds, in unleavened bread, and in the grape bruised with the husk together as it grows, so that it is a kind of marmalade, and is given in a flat spoon. Whatever they may pretend, some mixture seems necessary to keep it from fermentation in the state that it is in, unless the dried cluster is fresh bruised just before it is used; for it is little more fluid than the common marmalade of confectioners; but it is perfectly the grape as it grew, bruised stones and skin together. Some means, however, have been used, as I suppose, to prevent fermentation, and make it keep; and though this is constantly denied, I have often thought I tasted with a flavour that was not natural to the grape itself.

It is a mistake that there is no wine in Abyssinia; for a quantity of excellent strong wine is made at Dreedra, south-west from Gondar about thirty miles, which would more than supply the quantity necessary for the celebration of the eucharist in all Abyssinia twenty times over. The people themselves are not fond of wine, and plant the vine in one place only; and in this they have been imitated by the Egyptians, their colony; but a small black grape, of an excellent flavour, grows plentifully wild in every wood in Tigre.

Large pieces of bread are given to the communicants, in proportion to their quality; and I have seen great men, who, though they open their mouths as wide as conveniently a man can do, yet from the respect the priest bore him, such a portion of the loaf was put into his mouth, that water ran from his eyes, from the incapacity of chewing it; which, however, he does as indecently, and with full as much noise, as he eats at table.

After receiving the sacrament of the eucharist in

782 both kinds, a pitcher of water is brought, of which
 796 the communicant drinks a large draught; and well
 he needs it to wash down the quantity of bread he has
 just swallowed. He then retires from the steps of the
 inner division, upon which the administering priest
 stands, and, turning his face to the wall of the church,
 in private, says some prayer with seeming decency and
 attention.

The Romanists doubt of the validity of the Abyssinian consecration of the elements; because in their liturgy it is plainly said, "Lord, put thy hand upon this cup, and bless it, and sanctify it, and purify it, that in it may be made thy holy blood;" and of the bread they say, "Bless this saucer, or plate, that in it may be made thy holy body." And in their prayer they say, "Change this bread, that it may be made thy pure body which is joined with this cup of thy precious blood." The Jesuits doubt of the validity of this consecration, because it is said, "this *bread* is my body;" and over the wine, "this *cup* is my blood;" whereas, to operate a true transubstantiation, they should say over the bread, "this is my body."

For my own part, I leave it to the reverend fathers, who are the best judges, what is necessary to operate this miracle of transubstantiation. The reality of the thing itself is denied by all Protestant churches, has been often doubted by others, has been ridiculed by lay-writers, and can never be a matter, I believe, of thorough conviction, much less of proof, to any. The dignity of the subject, on which it touches nearly, as well as tenderness for our brethren on the continent, an article of whose faith it is, should always screen it from being treated with pleasantry, whatever we believe, or whether we believe it or not.

M. Ludolf thinks, that the words I have set down are a proof the Abyssinians do not believe in transub-

stantiation. For my part, from those very words, I 176 ●
cannot think any thing is clearer than that they do; 182
the bread is upon the plate; they pray that the plate
may be blessed, "That in it the bread may be made
God's holy body*;" and of the wine they say, "That
it may be made thy holy blood:" and in their prayer
they say, "Change this bread, that it may be made thy
body;" and again, "May the Holy Ghost shine upon
this bread, that it may be made the body of Christ our
God, and that this cup may be changed and become
the blood, not the *symbol*, of the blood of Christ our
God." With all respect to Mr Ludolf's opinion, I
must think that, though the benediction prayed upon
the patine, spoon, and chalice, is but an awkward ex-
pression, yet, if I understand the language, *converte*
and *immutetur* are literal translations of the Ethiopic,
and seem to pray for a transubstantiation as directly
as words will admit, whether they believe in it or not;
nor, as far as I know, can any stronger or more ex-
pressive be found to substitute in their place.

I shall finish this subject (which is not in my pro-
vince, and which I have mentioned, because I know it
is a matter which some of my readers desire informa-
tion upon) by an anecdote that happened a few months
before my coming into Abyssinia, as it was acciden-
tally told me by the priest of Adowa the very day of
the Epiphany, and which Janni vouched to be true,
and to have seen.

The Sunday before Ras Michael's departure for
Gondar from Adowa, he went to church in great
pomp, and there received the sacrament. There hap-
pened to be such a crowd to see him, that the wine,
part of the consecrated elements, was thrown down

* See the Ethiopic liturgies *passim*. Ludolf, lib. iii. cap. 5.

- 796 and spilt upon the steps whereon the communicants
782 stood at receiving. Some straw or hay was instantly gathered and sprinkled upon it to cover it, and the communicants continued the service till the end, treading that grass under foot.

This giving great offence to Janni, and some few priests that lived with him, it was told Michael, who, without explaining himself, said only, "As to the fact of throwing the hay, they are a parcel of hogs, and know no better." These few words had stuck in the stomach of the priest of Adowa, who, with great secrecy, and as a mark of friendship, begged I would give him my opinion what he should have done, or rather, what would have been done in my country? I told him, "That the answer to his question depended upon two things, which, being known, his difficulties would very easily be solved. If you do believe that the wine spilt by the mob upon the steps, and trod under foot afterwards, was really the blood of Jesus Christ, then you was guilty of a most horrid crime, and you should cry upon the mountains to cover you, and ages of atonement are not sufficient to expiate it. You should, in the mean time, have railed the place round with iron, or built it round with stone, that no foot, or any thing else but the dew of heaven, could have fallen upon it, or you should have brought in the river upon the place that would have washed it all to the sea, and covered it ever after from sacrilegious profanation. But if, on the contrary, you believe (as many Christian churches do), that the wine (notwithstanding consecration) remained in the cup nothing more than wine, but was only the symbol, or type, of Christ's blood of the New Testament, then the spilling it upon the steps, and the treading upon it afterwards, having been merely accidental, and out of your power to prevent, being so far from your wish

that you are heartily sorry that it happened, I do not reckon that you are further liable in the crime of sacrilege, than if the wine had not been consecrated at all. You are to humble yourself, and sincerely regret that so irreverent an accident happened in your hands, and in your time; but as you did not intend it, and could not prevent it, the consequence of an accident, where inattention is exceedingly culpable, will be imputed to you, and nothing further." 796 ●
782

The priest declared to me, with great earnestness, that he never did believe that the elements in the eucharist were converted by consecration into the real body and blood of Christ. He said, however, that he believed this to be the Roman Catholic faith, but it never was his; and that he conceived the bread was bread, and the wine was wine, even after consecration. From this example, which occurred merely accidentally, and was not the fruit of interrogation or curiosity, it appears to me, whatever the Jesuits say, some at least among the Abyssinians do not believe the real presence in the eucharist; but further I am not enough informed to give a positive opinion. To follow this investigation more curiously would have been attended with a considerable degree of danger; and therefore I have stated my only means of knowledge, and leave my readers entirely to the freedom of their own opinion, and to after inquiry and information.

The Abyssinians are not all agreed about the state of souls before the resurrection of the body. The opinion which generally prevails is, that there is no third state: but that, after the example of the thief, the souls of good men enjoy the beatific vision immediately upon the separation from the body. But I must here observe, that their practice and books do both contradict this; for, as often as any person dies, alms are given, and prayers are offered for the souls 764
775

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804

MP5 Amhara MP5

BOOKS VII. AND VIII.

principal revenue of the clergy is the presents made by ^{The} those who are sick, or dying. 794

The dress of the Acab saat is a purple burnoose, with a white turban, not unlike the Turkish Imams, or a white handkerchief hanging loose behind. The Kees hatze is the king's official confessor, official Alaka of the church of Tecla-haimanout, and curator of the two churches of Gondar. 292

The Abuna's words of absolution, in a case of excommunication, is, "Gzier ephiac," God absolve thee. 783

Women, after having born a son, are excluded from the church 40 days, and if a daughter, 80. The really married are those who receive the sacrament on that occasion. Persons who have been connected with any woman, are excluded from church during three days; if that connection has been promiscuous, they are excluded seven; and then even admitted to receive the sacrament. If a man, really married, is guilty with another's wife, he is not debarred a longer period. Women in the menses are not allowed to enter the church till seven days afterwards. Circumcision is performed on the eighth, and baptism is celebrated on the forty-first day of the child's age. On all the fore-mentioned occasions they only come within the inner precinct, and kiss the walls and door-posts of the church. The clergy are rigid in these matters, and that is, perhaps, one of the reasons why the churches are ill-attended. It is their only duty; the monks making no scruple of confessing that they cannot enter the church, for that day they had to do with a woman, which is not attended with any impeachment. 796 784 846 941 304 852

Geography and revenue of Abyssinia.—The Iteghe from Bure in two days arrived at Metchakel, in her way to Gojam: It may be about as far as from this (Gondar) to Caroota; I suppose from 30 to 32 miles at farthest. From Metchakel to Nazarit six days easy journey; from 10 to 12 miles, I suppose, *per diem*. Gojam here belongs to Ayto Aylo, son of Ozoro Wellela Israel. The Galla are Toluma. The Galla who border on Amhara are much the worst of all the Galla, and the least worst are the Edjow east of them, bordering upon Begemder and Angot, called Guangoul Galla. Those near Amhara are Wutchali, Woolo, Amito, and Toluma; 31 361 101

[p. 57]

NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA 187

the eye. Its beauty was not increased by the addition of a corrugated iron annexe for the purpose of seating some of the foreign guests at the Emperor's coronation. 346

The Abouna was good enough to arrange for us to visit the church, and we were received with ceremony by a number of priests, who were exceedingly kind and enabled us to make a thorough inspection, and even allowed us to take some photographs (which unfortunately, owing to the bad light, did not come out). They showed us everything with great enthusiasm and begged us to return "when a great feast was in progress". The building consists of three portions, a sort of outer gallery, an inner court, and finally the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, an inner chamber in the centre of the building in which rests the *Tabot* or representative of the Ark of the Covenant to which only the priests are allowed access. 346 778

The priests threw open the doors of the Holy Place for us to see in; it contained a kind of altar where the Sacraments are kept, and was surrounded by priests in very gorgeous vestments, burning incense and holding big crosses and crucifixes. 778 788

In one of the galleries a service was proceeding. Two priests were beating with their hands very big drums made of wood and hide; many others were shaking their curious little brass cymbals; and all were chanting, swaying their bodies, and slowly waving their praying-sticks. The time was really good, and the chant was rhythmic and tuneful, and not at all unmelodious. 196 534

The galleries were profusely decorated with huge life-size paintings depicting mainly scenes from the Scriptures, scenes from the life of Christ, the miracles, etc.; one dreadfully realistic picture of the Massacre 353 532

188 NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

353 of the Innocents was very striking. There was also a
532 portrait of the Emperor Menelik, and of other noted
characters in Abyssinian history; the likenesses of royal
and other famous persons are frequently to be found on
the walls or among the possessions of the principal
churches.

778 In this connection an amusing incident is told by
Stern. King Sehala Selassie had been given by Captain
Harris' mission to the Court of Shoa, a portrait of Queen
Victoria. This had been carefully guarded for many
years amongst his treasures until his death, some time
after which his successor, King Haile Malekot, pre-
sented it to the principal church at Ankober where the
people used to flock on grand festivities to worship it as
the representation of the Virgin Mary!

The *Tobot*, to which reference has been made, is the
object of much veneration and has to be blessed or
consecrated prior to being used in the particular church
to which it is allocated. In one case the priest in charge
of the church had committed a murder, and the *Tobot*
had to be sent up to Addis to be reconsecrated before
it could be used again.

• 196 The most prominent features of the practice of their
785 religion are the fasts, feasts, and pageants; and each
of these is sufficiently remarkable. A very large part
of the year—about 150 days—falls under the category
of fast or feast, and both are strictly observed. During
their fasts they are forbidden not only meat, but also
butter and milk and eggs, and it is really surprising to
see to what an extent this rigid abstinence is followed,
especially as the fasting periods are lengthy, that prior
to Easter lasting forty days.

For a day or so immediately prior to the main feast,

NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA 189

that is, at the end of a long period of fasting, they eat ⁷⁹⁶ nothing at all, and so far do they carry this rule that ⁷⁸⁵ sometimes one or two of our older servants have become so weak that they have had to go home and remain in bed, so exhausted were they.

On Wednesdays and Fridays they eat no meat, and wherever they are or whatever they are doing they adhere firmly to this rule. I was immensely struck by this when on trek; for example, one day we had bought an ox for our men and on Thursday they had had a great raw meat banquet. The next day being Friday they would not touch an atom of the quantities of raw meat hung round the camp, though they had had a long and tiring march and had nothing else to eat. One of the men, who was really ill, would not drink a drop of the fresh milk we had prescribed for him, though he was excessively weak and could not retain anything else.

Their feasts are observed just as whole-heartedly, and obviously with more enthusiasm, inasmuch as much ⁷⁹⁶ eating and drinking and no work are the order of the ⁵²⁷ day. Their main feasts are New Year, the Feast of the Cross or *Maskal*, *Temkat* (Epiphany), and Easter.

Their New Year's Day, the 1st Maskaram, falls on the 11th September (or the 12th in the European year preceding our Leap year) and is a great feast, and of course a general holiday, the religious side of which is strongly marked, the Empress and the Court attending the Church of St. George in state.

No work is done, and there is much eating, an oasis of plenty in the desert of fasting which starts again on the day after New Year's Day, and continues until the end of the month. Bands of grown-up people and groups of children wander round serenading the differ-

190 NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

- 196 ent houses, and although their intentions are doubtless
527 of the best, the sounds they produce leave much to be
desired from the point of view of harmony.

At the end of September is held the Feast of *Maskal*. There are three separate functions during the week in this connection, firstly the Dance of the Priests, 21st September, then the Dance of the Cross, 27th September, which includes a fantasia in which thousands of mounted troops take part, and finally the great *Gebbar* at which 17,000 to 18,000 men are fed (28th September).

On the day of the Dance of the Cross, after dinner we could see from our verandah the whole country for miles in every direction dotted with bonfires—a wonderful sight. Every Abyssinian must light something on this night, and they seemed to have done it pretty thoroughly; even high up in the mountains far away one could see the little points of light everywhere.

The Feast of the *Maskal* itself, which took place on the next day, is mainly remarkable for the great banquet; this I have described elsewhere, and though it is held on a religious festival the religious nature of it is less apparent.

- 796 *Temkat* (18th, 19th, and 20th January) is perhaps the most beautiful and remarkable of their various pageants, and I will accordingly endeavour to give some idea of this ceremony, unique as it probably is.

It is difficult in mere words to do justice to the really wonderful pageantry attendant on these religious festivals. Their historical significance alone is worthy of the pen of a Gibbon, for they are probably some 3000 years old in some of their features, and half-

NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA 191

closing one's eyes it is possible to imagine the picture before one to be that of David, his priests, and his courtiers dancing before the ark, as the priests in their centuries-old vestments sway and swing before the modern representation of the Ark of the Covenant. And the colouring—the gorgeous medley of crimson and purple and yellow and green cloaks of the priests, their gold and silver croziers, crowns, and censers, the soft thrumming of the huge old drums, the feathery spirals of sweet-smelling incense curling lazily up into the air—all framed in a grand setting of green trees and running water, while above out of a brilliant blue sky the blazing African sun sparkles and glitters on all the medley of gold and silver and colour below, and—strange contrast—farther off, on the rifles of the thousand watching troops and their loose white toga-like *chammas*. 796.

Especially do these considerations apply to the second day of *Temkat*, the blessing of the waters. On the first day the *Tabot* is borne from the Church of St. George in the midst of an immense procession of chiefs, priests, soldiers, banner-bearers, and musicians, through the town to the spot by the river which has been selected for the ensuing day's ceremony. The procession itself is sufficiently remarkable, and the inhabitants of the city crowd the roads to watch the brilliant stream of colour flow past, their shrill, tremulous "*el-el-to*" sounding to our ears a strange substitute for the cheers of a crowd in our own countries.

The procession winds its way through the town and beyond it to the river, and there tents are pitched, the *Tabot* is deposited within one of them, priests take up their quarters in others, soldiery in yet others, and with

192 NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

• 196 thousands of Abyssinians spend the night on the spot in readiness for the morning's function, which, commencing soon after daybreak (between 6 and 6.30), lasts well on to noon.

The spot seemed to have been chosen so as to lend additional enchantment to the ceremony. The river shrunken to a stream now in the middle of the dry season flowed smoothly over huge rocks and boulders round a curve, on between high banks sloping for several hundreds of yards upwards and away. Part of the stream had been dammed so as to form a pool just by a natural platform of grass and trees on the very edge of the waters, and here the principal actors were grouped, whilst above and around them thousands and thousands of spectators in rank after rank seemed but to act as a conductor to focus the eye on to the scene being enacted below. Here was Ras Tafari in his robes of state under a magnificent gold-fringed umbrella; here were the great officers of State with their velvet and silk cloaks, their silken shirts, and their great curved gold-scabbarded swords. And here were the priests dazzling one's eyes by the brilliance of their apparel and their accessories.

Standing a little way up the river-bank amid a small knot of Europeans lost in the sea of Abyssinians, it was almost hypnotizing to watch the scene. The drums beaten softly with the palms of the hands accompanied the low chanting of the priests and the rhythmical waving of their praying-sticks, while the fumes from the incense burners crept upwards to mingle with the almost mysterious mistiness of the early morning sunlight.

The water was eventually blessed, and some of it

NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA 193

in a great gold dish carried to the Ras, who was sprinkled with it—rebaptized in fact—with many rites and much ceremony. Other notables were similarly honoured, and then water was thrown over the nearest of the waiting thousands. Those beyond surged forward to receive their share, and the pressure of the immense multitude must have been enormous, but their orderliness was no less remarkable, and no untoward incidents occurred. 796●

With some further chanting the first portion of the ceremony came to an end, and the scene was changed to the great open plain between the town and the Foreign Legations, which is used as review ground, polo field, and racecourse. In solemn procession, ruler, courtiers, priests, and soldiers wended their way up from the banks of the little stream, up through rocky paths and grassy slopes towards the centre of the plain, whilst thousands and thousands of the people poured in a great stream all round them to take their share in the further pageantry. On our sure-footed little ponies we were swept along in the moving masses, all cheery and good tempered, dressed in their clean white *chammas*, which had been washed for the occasion in the river the day before. With the help of a *balderabba* we were able to take a short cut to the scene of the next step in the proceedings, and seated on chairs round beautifully coloured Persian and Indian rugs in front of a silk-lined tent which sheltered the throne from the fast warming rays of the sun, we watched amid the waiting multitudes the arrival of the royal procession and of fresh throngs, not the least remarkable members of which were a mounted band of wild-looking men clothed in scarlet robes and playing strange instru-

194 NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

796 ments, whilst their shaggy little ponies curveted and plunged like mad things.

Dressed in his magnificent Abyssinian robes, carrying a modern rifle, and mounted on a wonderfully caparisoned black mule, Ras Tafari rode slowly up to the tent and took his seat on the throne surrounded by hundreds of gorgeously clad notables, and facing what was perhaps the most striking contingent of all, the priests, ranged on three sides of a square in front of the throne. Those on the opposite side of the square were all in white; those on the right and left wore robes of such dazzling colouring that in the sun's bright rays it almost hurt one's eyes to look at them. Red, blue, green, orange, purple, every imaginable colour, thickly covered with heavy gold and silver embroideries, and gold ornaments and head-dresses. And as if this orgy of colour were not enough, servants held scores of gaudy coloured gold-embroidered and much befringed and tasselled umbrellas over them.

796 Many of the priests carried magnificent crosses of
 778 gold and silver, others their long silver or ivory-handled
 534 praying-sticks, whilst some held various musical bell-like instruments, and about half a dozen managed large drums—things about three feet high made of silver with copper bands. Particularly striking were the dresses of ten young boys bearing golden crowns, symbolical of the ten commandments; while the *Tabots* brought from the neighbouring churches were very gorgeously bedecked. It was a wonderful and barbaric sight.

796 And then the Dance of the Priests began. Low
 535 chanting without music at first, followed by slow graceful movements of all their hundreds of arms in fine

NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA 195

time to the rhythm, then the little bell cymbals joined in, and finally the big drums. 796 535

All this time the long lines of priests were advancing and retiring, turning this way and that, their bodies swaying to the music. The time got quicker and quicker, others joined in, their movements became accentuated and their voices rose to a climax; then quite suddenly sound and movement ceased and the long lines were quite still.

After this, passages were read from enormous silver-covered Bibles, and with a final boom of the drums it was all over—a morning's journey back through the centuries, probably unique in the world in its character. 796

The Abyssinian Easter falls a week later than our own and is the occasion of great feasting; much rifle firing takes place the night before (or used to two years ago when ammunition was more plentiful), and much eating and drinking, on the day itself. And I am bound to say they must need it, for they have been fasting for forty days, and for the two previous days have eaten nothing at all. 796 527

Bands of priests visit the principal houses, soliciting alms, and I find the following description of one of these visits in my diary:

"Soon after breakfast a party of about five priests accompanied by attendants came up the drive, stationed themselves in front of the house, and began to sing and ring bells to wish us a prosperous Easter. Some of the priests wore their gorgeous vestments, and all had brilliant green or red silk parasols fringed with gold braid. We sent them out a small offering, which appeared to please them very much.

196 NATIONAL CHURCH & RELIGION OF ABYSSINIA

- 796
527 "Then they blessed a lot of long grass they had, and gave it to us and we distributed it amongst the staff. Every servant there tied his piece of grass tightly round his head and wore it all day—they all seemed highly delighted."

771 But in spite of their strict observance of feasts and their pride in the fact of their being Christians, I cannot really think that they could in any sense of the word be described as a really religious people, their lives being in no way a reflection of their theoretical beliefs. Their religion is overlaid with a thick layer of superstition, some of which is merely curious, but some apt to have dangerous results. Thus they wear their charms and amulets suspended round their necks by a silken cord (never leather, which is used by Mohammedans for this purpose); they have a strong belief in the power of the "evil eye"; they will not look at a person eating, they will not start on journeys on certain days, and they believe that certain houses are inhabited by evil spirits and will not live in them.

787 We came across some curious examples of this latter superstition. Two important Abyssinian nobles had built in their grounds quite nice stone and mortar houses in the European style. These houses were lying empty, and their owners were living in native built *tukuls*, for the reason that their tame priests had told them that evil would befall them if they moved into their new residences.

Another and more serious example was that of a chief who was very ill with pneumonia. He was just getting over it when in the middle of one night his priest told him that he had had a vision to the effect that if he

61 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

games with sticks and cloth, or wooden, balls. The adult males may do odd jobs around home, such as loading and moving bags of grain, or repairing farm equipment. But they are likely to gather at some convenient spot, perhaps at a boundary between fields, and discuss land disputes, arrange marriages, reconcile quarrels, or tell stories.

The daily activity of the Amhara peasant is somber and severe. It is guided by the constant awareness that one must provide for oneself everything he needs in this world. His is a life of deadening exertion, devoid of casual gaiety. Even in his diversions the mood is generally serious and tense.

One of the Amhara peasant's principal diversions is litigation. On days when heavy labor is forbidden the judge's yard is filled; nor is it ever empty on work days. Some peasants spend as much as twenty to twenty-five per cent of their waking days at court. (Because of its importance in Amhara culture, litigation will be discussed at greater length in later chapters.)

Going to market is another diversion. The trip is made by the peasant or his wife, or both, according to the needs of the household. The wife usually is responsible for transactions dealing with cooking equipment and spices, the husband for animals and farm equipment, while either is competent to negotiate about the great common denominator of Amhara life—grain. Exchanges are made either by barter or currency, which in olden times consisted of salt bars, pepper, and iron, as well as silver.

The market provides an occasion for seeing distant relatives and friends, catching up on the latest news of the area, and generally countering the normal isolation of the peasant's life. It is especially stimulating for children, who may be treated to a piece of sugar cane if they are lucky. But the marketgoers are less absorbed with being sociable than they are with the serious business of locating the items they lack, haggling over the terms of exchange, and getting on the trail in time to arrive home before dark.

Finally, the peasant's day may be devoted to one of the many celebrations that constitute the brightest moments in his life. Huge feasts are held on the occasion of weddings, christenings, and memorial anniversaries. Feasts and special festive activities mark the various religious holidays. Indeed, apart from the alternation of the rainy season (June-September) and the long dry season, and the related alternation of planting and harvesting the different crops, it is the cycle of holidays and weddings that defines the pattern of the Abyssinian year. Yet even these holidays have a fundamentally serious tone. Apart from the feasting, they are chiefly times for the veneration of sacred symbols and the real or symbolic letting out of aggression.

The Yearly Cycle

The new year falls on St. John's Day in September. For this occasion the floor of the peasant's home is strewn with freshly cut grass, tall and green after

62 / WAX & GOLD

- *565 the long rains. Children go singing from house to house in small bands, or
 • 796 take bunches of wild flowers to relatives, in hopes of getting a bit of *dābo*. In most homes an animal is slaughtered—in some areas superstition decrees that it be a white-headed lamb or a red chicken—and there is much eating and drinking, the basic activity of every holiday.

A little more than two weeks later the much more important festival of Masqal is observed, celebrating the discovery of the true Cross by Empress Helena. By this time the heavy rains have subsided, and the air is filled with something of the spirit of spring. (Although Ethiopia lies north of the [32] equator the summer rainy season is known as "winter" because of its coldness.) The landscape is colored by acres of yellow wildflowers, which are cut and fastened to the poles each family brings to a central clearing where a huge bonfire is built. In late afternoon, after the tepee of poles has been constructed, the priests begin the ceremony by intoning appropriate chants. Then [554] each status group circles the poles three times, in honor of the Trinity—first the local lord, then the clergy, the lesser nobility, the peasant men, women, and finally the children. In the evening the festival takes a more secular turn. The bonfire is lit, and the young braves dance around it shouting their war chants. As the fire blazes on, these fellows seize burning brands and playfully hurl them at one another.

In November the monthly St. Michael's Day is honored with special [778] celebrations. The peasants travel distances to attend the ceremonies at any church consecrated to "Mikā'el." Holy water and hot springs sanctified by Mikā'el's name are drunk and bathed in by those with many kinds of disease. The rituals involve carrying the Mikā'el *sābos* ("holy ark") out of the church and elaborate chanting and dancing by the clergy. After the *sābos* has been returned, in a procession in which the laymen follow shouldering their rifles (undoubtedly spears in older times), folk dancing and singing go on until late [584] afternoon. This provides an occasion for the more enterprising adolescent male to spot a potential bride, about whom he may diffidently ask his father to make inquiries.

*565 Christmas, celebrated in early January, is marked chiefly by the playing of
 796 secular games. The common word for Christmas, *gannā*, is actually the name
 526 of an outdoors game played with sticks and a wooden puck. Played by boys, young men, and occasionally elders on the afternoon of Christmas Day, *gannā* is marked by a spirit of aggressive license. Accustomed norms of deference are held in abeyance. The game is played in so rough and disorderly a manner that it often results in broken limbs and scarred faces. Staged by two teams made up on the spot, *gannā* is concluded at dusk by volleys of abusive limericks with which the victors revile their adversaries.⁴

*565 This is the season for special festivities on saints' days. St. Gabriel is particu-
 796 larly honored in December, as are St. Mary, St. George, and again St. Michael

63 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

in January. But the giant of holidays in this season is Epiphany, about a fortnight after Christmas. The holiday commemorates the baptism of Jesus; the name of the holiday, *Ṭimqat*, means "baptism." In preparation for *Ṭimqat* new clothes are given to children and the adults' *shammā*, grown very gray over the months, are washed in every household. [565* 796] [296]

The program for *Ṭimqat* is long and complicated. At sunset on the eve of the holiday, the people don their white clothes and repair to the local church, from whence they escort the *tābot* to a place where it will spend the night—near some stream or pool. They go home for supper, and return to that site for singing and dancing until late at night. About two o'clock in the morning Mass is performed, after which quantities of *dābo* and *tallā* are consumed. ~~Toward dawn or about after the clergy bless the water and sprinkle it on~~ those assembled. Many like to bathe in the sanctified water at this time. It is the occasion for baptizing the children of syphilitic mothers and those who want to be rebaptized. [798] [851]

By noon on *Ṭimqat* Day a large crowd has assembled at the ritual site, those who went home for a little sleep having returned, and the holy ark is escorted back to its church in colorful procession. The clergy, bearing robes and umbrellas of many hues, perform rollicking dances and songs; the elders march solemnly with their weapons, attended by middle-aged men singing a long-drawn, low-pitched *haaa hooo*; and the children run about with sticks and games. Dressed up in their finest, the women chatter excitedly on their one real day of freedom in the year. The young braves leap up and down in spirited dances, tirelessly repeating rhythmic songs. When the holy ark has been safely restored to its dwelling-place, everyone goes home for feasting. In the meantime, the eyes of gamesome men and women have met and secret rendezvous have been arranged.

Ṭimqat ushers in a season of weddings, which comes to an abrupt end with the onset of the great fast before Easter. For eight long weeks, body and spirit are depressed by the heavy fasting requirements. The mood reaches a climax in the final week of Lent. Then no heavy work is allowed, and the more devout peasants go to church many times and intensify their daily schedule of prayers. Total abstinence is practiced for the forty-eight hours preceding the final Mass, performed in the middle of the night before Easter. [585] [785] [461] [782] [785]

Gluttony follows this long deprivation. It is a season of the highest spirits. For eight weeks the inexorable requirement to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays is waived. The bins are full with the harvest of wheat, barley, and chick-peas. New crops of pulse start to appear in the fields. It is the most favored time of all for weddings. [261] [785] [241] [585]

And then, as the Amhara themselves view it, June brings another time of sadness. With the onset of the heavy rains come attacks of malaria in the lowlands, typhus in the highlands. Swollen streams make travel difficult and [821] [64]

64 / WAX & GOLD

*565 hazardous. Moisture and chill lower the resistance of man and beast to re-
 • 796 spiratory infections. The weekly fasting schedule is resumed, and the more
 [164] devout observe the thirty-day fast of the Disciples. In August, finally, the
 [185] sixteen-day fast in honor of the Assumption of Mary is observed by everyone
 older than six or seven years.

*565 On the thirteenth day of that fast occurs the strange holiday of Buhē.
 796 Before and during this day, which is marked by the baking of special *dābo* for
 526 the shepherds, the countryside crackles with the reports of shepherds' whips.
 In this season when the humid air lends an explosive sound, the shepherds
 crack their whips for fun; but older boys and men join in great whipping
 battles on Buhē,* in which two teams lash each other until the members of
 one can stand it no more. On the evenings of Buhē, small bonfires are lit all
 over the countryside, and more *dābo* is eaten and whips cracked.* A few days
 later the fast of the Assumption is over. Young and old look forward to the
 end of the rains and the festivities that commence with the new year.

*565 These are the days and years of the Amhara peasant. Some other aspects
 of his life that come to the fore when more analytic perspectives are applied
 will be discussed in later chapters. But this calendar of activities forms the
 immediately observable setting for the "inner world" of the Amhara peasant-
 ry: those ideas, sentiments, and values which constitute its outlook on life.

THE WORLD OF MEANING

*565 The Natural Universe

792 The Amhara peasant is not familiar with most of the cosmological notions
 [538] found in the Great Tradition of Abyssinian culture, as transmitted through
 books like *Qalamis* and *Aksimareos* and the oral traditions of learned
 churchmen. It is unusual for him to have a precise image of the layers of
 water, fire, and air beneath the earth, and it is still less likely for him to be
 familiar with the complicated hierarchy of invisible worlds, watery skies, and
 seven "real" heavens which are enumerated in the Abyssinian cosmology. He
 [821] believes that stars influence human affairs, but leaves the possession of astro-
 [756] logical knowledge to the *dabtarā*. The presence of cultural specialists who
 know about such matters has relieved him of the burden of dealing with ideas
 about the cosmos, ideas which are more widely diffused in more homogeneous
 societies.

The peasant's working conception of the cosmos is thus a very simplified
 version of that of his Great Tradition, together with certain pagan notions.
 Like his more learned countrymen, he divides the universe into two main
 parts: the world, *alam*, consisting of the earth, sun, moon, and stars; and

[198] • This custom is now extinct in many Amhara areas.

72 / WAX & GOLD

771 Besides dominating Abyssinian ritual activity, they constitute the major foci
776 for the organization of time and space.
805

*565 In the Abyssinian world view, time is not rationalized for secular purposes.
805 Some peasants calculate the hour by the shadows on mountains, but the effort is not taken very seriously. Units of time are of little concern in the workaday world. When a man says he is going on a trip "tomorrow," everyone assumes that he means he may be leaving a few days later. Many appointments are made, but few are kept literally; so that the phrase *kābasha qataro* ("Abyssinian appointment") has come to signify an appointment to which one comes quite late or not at all. There is little sense of time in the abstract. When an Amhara peasant is asked how long a certain trip takes, he does not reply "ten hours," but rather: "If you leave here at dawn you will arrive there before it turns dark"; and his estimate of the arrival time tends to vary according to whether or not he wants the questioner to make the trip.

*565 Historical time is still more vaguely conceived than local time. The Am-
805 hara peasant has little sense or knowledge of history. He considers all that happened before Menelik's day as "ancient times," and more or less as an undifferentiated period. He knows very few of the earlier emperors, no historical dates, and often not even the exact year, let alone date, of his own birth. He has no idea when the church in his area was built and no interest in preserving such historical monuments or mementos as may exist in his country.

*565 When, as often happens, anecdotes about historical figures are retold
538 around the fireplace, the interest is not in the historical context or significance
829 of the story but in the cleverness or heroism of the characters. Much attention is paid to genealogical lines insofar as they are relevant to potential litigation regarding rights to the use of land, but not with any concern for an objective account of historical connections. In fact, the same man may give differing accounts of the way in which he is related to a given ancestor, depending on the practical interest which underlies his recitation.⁸

*565 With regard to his religious calendar, however, the Amhara peasant is
805 acutely conscious of the passage of time. This concern is symbolized by a ceremony held in the churches after Mass at the beginning of each new year.
• 796 A *dabtarā* stands before the people and calculates the dates for the important
(787) holidays and fasts during the coming year. Sometimes this exercise is preceded by relating the story of Demetrios, the man who after long struggles succeeded in discovering the formula by which the Orthodox calendar can be computed—so that, for example, the short fast before Lent will begin on a Monday.

The symbols of this calendar are the names of the saints. Each group of four years is named after the Four Gospels, with that of St. John (*Yohānnes*)
(576) representing leap year. The customary greeting at New Year's is of the form:

73 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

"May He bring you safely from the year of Mark to the year of Lukel"
 Nearly every day of the month, moreover, is dedicated to some holy figure,
 the main ones being:

Day of Month	Name	Meaning
1st	<i>Ledatā</i>	Birth of Mary
5th	<i>Abbo</i>	St. Gabra Manfas Qeddu
7th	<i>Selassie</i>	Trinity
12th	<i>Mikā'el</i>	St. Michael
16th	<i>Kidāna Maherat</i>	Covenant of Mercy (for Mary)
19th	<i>Gabre'el</i>	St. Gabriel
21st	<i>Māryām</i>	St. Mary
23rd	<i>Giyorgis</i>	St. George
24th	<i>Takla Hāymānot</i>	St. Takla Hāymānot
27th	<i>Madhāni Alam</i>	Savior of the World
29th	<i>Bāla Wald</i>	Festival of the Son

This schedule is well implanted in the peasant's mind, so much so that the names of these holy days come to take the place of calendar dates. Thus, instead of saying "He fell sick on the fifth" or "He is due to come on the twelfth," the Amhara normally says "He fell sick on Abbo" or "He is due to come on Mikā'el."

Time for the Amhara is thus not a morally indifferent and qualitatively undifferentiated continuum. It is a series of occasions with more or less sacred significance. These occasions are arranged in the form of cycles. In contrast to the Catholic calendar with its different saint for each day of the year, every month in Abyssinia repeats the same set of saints' days. Each year, of course, repeats the same cycle of annual holidays. The years themselves do not run on continuously, but follow the cycle—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—again and again. For the more learned, finally, there is a twenty-eight-year cycle which must elapse before the same year begins on the same day of the week again.

The Amhara's experience of time is thus essentially cyclical. The religious calendar, the most important dimension of time for him, consists of a series of epicycles, in which the monthly rounds play themselves out within the larger circles of annual and quadrennial rounds. Historical events are at best secondary: the seasons come and go, generations come and go, but there is not much new under the sun. The better-known prophecies foretell the return of some state of things that obtained in the past. Kassa chose the throne name of Tēwodros II because of the prophecy that a king with that name would arise to repeat the mythically fortunate reign of Tēwodros I of the fifteenth century. In this century has arisen the prophecy of another Tēwodros to come. Still another prophecy—of a short-lived invasion of Ethio-

565*
805
796
[576]

[822]

565*
805
822
796

[787]

74 / WAX & GOLD

*565 pia by a Muslim from the East—suggests a repetition of the Grāñ episode.
 805 Finally, there is the previously mentioned conception of the end of the world
 • 796 as a time of renewal, when those who died first will return to life and history
 822 will begin again.
 787

822 Space, like time, is not regarded as an amoral and homogeneous continuum to be submitted to systematic measurement. Land is not something to be
 (423) bought or sold at will, but belongs by right to a family, a church, or a ruling line. Land titles are defined loosely, by convention and approximation, and the Amhara peasantry have objected to attempts by the government to make exact measurements of their land. The reluctance to rationalize space is conspicuous even in the capital of Ethiopia, where to this day there are no street numbers, so that places can only be identified roughly as near a certain police station or past a certain hospital. Directions are indicated with difficulty. The points of the compass are almost never used, though there are words for the four directions. Instead, the vague terms for "up" and "down" serve to answer almost every question about location.

*565 Though the peasants are often unclear about the precise boundaries of various place names in the countryside, they do know just where the several churches are located over a wide area. It is customary for them to locate a given place by reference to the nearest church. Thus they will say: "He lives below Abbo" or "We must travel above Mikā'el." As a result, locations in space are identified by the same set of co-ordinates as are events in time, namely, the names of the saints. Moreover, just as certain months each year are occasions for special celebrations in behalf of each sacred figure, so in the countryside certain churches are considered especially holy shrines. Thus, there is special veneration for *Terr Märyām* ("St. Mary's Day in the month of Terr") and *Gishēn Märyām* ("St. Mary's Church in the district of Gishēn").

*565 The dominant configuration in the Amhara's experience of space is that of concentric circles. Whether or not we try to relate this to the cyclical organization of time, the fact remains that the pattern of a charged center surrounded by circles of decreasing significance recurs in the main areas of Amhara life.

*565 It appears, first, in his architecture. The traditional peasant home is round, with a conical roof supported by a pole that rises in the center of the circle. This is the domestic inner sanctum, a room for eating and talking and getting warm by the fire. It is often separated by a circular partition from sections that serve for storage, cooking, and animals. The compound in which the home stands is surrounded in some regions by a stone or brush fence, a boundary that separates the residential kin group from the whole outside world.

*565 This pattern is more fully developed in the churches, which are round like the huts but larger and contain two concentric circular partitions inside. The

181
 796
 346
 441
 822

The 75 / *The World of the Amhara Peasant*

The holy ark stands in the center of the church, an area restricted to priests and deacons and consecrated to the performance of the Mass. The second circle is reserved for those few who are privileged to partake of Communion— young children and rare adults who have been married according to the church laws. The third circle is where ordinary people stand during the Mass and where the clergy sing and dance on special holidays. The church itself stands in a compound ringed by an outer wall, representing still another grade of ritual impurity. Those who have eaten before the Mass or have had sexual relations the night before are not supposed to enter the church at all, and must stand outside the outer wall during services.

This spatial pattern is likewise found in the arrangement of people out of doors. The outstanding instance of this is the traditional organization of the military camp of a *negus* or *räs*. In the center of the camp is the large, round tent of the chief, together with tents for the holy ark, high-ranking visitors, and supplies. Around this central area the commanding officers are stationed. They in turn are encircled by the tents of the cavalry. Beyond this ring, finally, is an outer circle composed of the huts of the common soldiery.

Spontaneous arrangements along this line appear during festivals. The person or persons who sing or dance are placed in the center and the spectators form a circle around them. During religious celebrations this circle consists of priests and *dabtarä*. At some distance the laymen watch from an outer circle. Here, as in the home, church, and military camp, concentric circles serve to segregate people according to their place in some hierarchical order.

Society and Human Nature

The Amhara's conceptualization of the human order lends itself as a whole to being articulated in terms of patterns of concentricity and hierarchy. The sociological component of the Amhara peasant world view consists, on the one hand, of a series of notions centered on the individual self and his progressively wider groupings; and, on the other hand, of a series of distinctions which rank persons in accord with criteria of superior and inferior qualities.

The Amhara peasant tends to have a pronounced awareness of his personal ego. The boundaries of his person and property appear firmly marked in his mind and are more important to him than the boundaries of any of his social egos. He likes to live on his own land, at a good distance from neighbors. If he lives in a homestead with other relatives, he prefers to dwell in his own separate building. The Amhara's proverbial comment on the subject is that "Home and the grave are by oneself." He is sensitive about his personal belongings, quick to defend his rights, reluctant to accept suggestions, and inflammable over insults. His conception of the admirable



FIG. 16.—The procession on Timqat Day



FIG. 17.—Timqat procession: detail

(P. 110-A)

133
796

142
291
302
534
796

259 / Individualism and Social Progress

proverb which stresses the rights of women in this regard gives the following advice: 121*

*Balāgar siṭagab yematāl ba-degger;
Tayawennā nay qitāwen yegägger.*

When a peasant gets sated he beats you with wood;
Leave and come home, let him bake his own bread!

593
586
(539)

A couple who have firmly decided upon divorce need simply call in their relatives or go before the *chīqā shum* in order to have their property properly divided. The only recourse to judicial process is when, as often happens, disputes break out concerning the division of property. In the *damos* form of marriage, in which there is no civil oath, divorce is yet simpler. The wife is given certain presents and a monthly salary for the duration of the marriage. When the husband has to leave for another part of the country, or if the couple quarrel, they simply separate without further ado.

Despite its heavy claim on the energies of its members, then, the Amhara kinship system is such as to make members of the nuclear family relatively independent of extended relationships, and to give the individual marriage partners important areas of independence from each other. 121*

Religious Organization

Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name. 121*

Certain obligations are incumbent upon every member of the church. Foremost among these is the requirement of fasting, which begins for children of both sexes at about the age of seven and introduces a considerable element of constraint into the lives of the Amhara. Second, there is the obligation to observe the Sabbaths and the main holidays by refraining from arduous physical labor on those days. In addition, each household is obliged to contribute a certain quantity of grain to the local church every year.* (795)
(794)
(851)
(553)
(785)
(796) •

Apart from the rigorous fasting requirements, and the injunction not to work on holy days—a dubious hardship—the individual is relatively free of ritual obligations. The rituals demanded by the church are so manifold, and so sacred, that responsibility for them is given to the clergy, and the laymen

* In some areas this is a fixed amount per household (e.g., one or two *qunna*); in others it is proportionate to the wealth of the family. It is collected by a lay official of the church, the *gend alaqa*, though sometimes by the *gabaz*.

443
632

centered in a town and extending outward to include those areas from which peasants come to buy and sell.

[132]
[484]

The size of the town's sphere contracts and expands seasonally, reaching its nadir during the rainy season, when overland travel becomes difficult owing to deep mud and raging torrents. Then, travelling is infrequent and confined to the market town closest to a peasant's home parish. Although market trips are more frequent during the remainder of the year, most terminate at the closest market. These relatively short trips are favored when grain is brought to the mills located on the periphery of most market sites. The spheres of the larger towns (Gondar, Debre Tabor, Dabat) reach maximum size on the market days which precede the great celebrations of the Coptic Church---Meskal (which celebrates the discovery of the True Cross, and follows the end of the rains), Michaelmas (November), Tinkat (feast of the Epiphany, and preceding the Lenten fast), and Easter. Map 3 indicates the extreme limits for market spheres of the towns of the Begemder highlands.

[491]

The highland market towns are strung along the province's only all-weather motor road.¹⁴ Each offers a

[648]

¹⁴This road, built during the Italian occupation (1936-1941), runs north to Asmara (capital of Eritrea) and (since the 1960's) south to Addis Ababa (the national capital). A dry season road links the highland towns to Metemma on the Sudan border.

443
632

once-weekly market, staggered, so that the market days of over-lapping spheres do not coincide. Peasant exchange at these markets tend to be "sectional" in character; that is to say, producer-sellers bring regional specialties (such as cotton and high quality cayenne from kola lands; cereals, fresh vegetables, and livestock from highland farms), or occupational specialties (such as Falasha iron mongery and pots; the leather goods of the Fakiy, a largely endogamous artisan group). In addition to local products, peasants come to purchase imported goods (especially clothing) and the produce of distant parts of the Empire (such as salt bars from the Danakil Depression). The market is also the peasant's tie to the world market, to which he sends cattle and cattle hides.

The large market towns, with their numerous consumer crowds, offer important economic inducements to [275] the peasant marketer. Beyond these economic functions, [548] the large town offers diversions and attractions unavailable in the peasant's home parish---exotic surroundings, the temporary fellowship and entertainment of beer houses and mead halls, and the sexual companionship of the town's numerous prostitutes.

632
• 796

The town also attracts peasant visitors on matters unrelated to the market place. The monthly feast days of various saints of the Coptic Church are occasions for special celebrations, and these attract peasants, out of

632
• [796] motives of piety and supplication, to the saints' epony-
[346] mic churches. Within the environs of Gondar, for ex-
ample, there are forty-two churches, and perhaps half
are of sufficient antiquity and fame to mark them for
special visits on the saints' days. Each of the market
towns contains at least one famous church. The larger
towns are, moreover, the seats of their sub-provinces,
and are the objects of visits by peasants on "govern-

[691] ment" (mongiat) business. Most frequently, this means
[423] litigation involving the disposition of land rights.

361 Two Rural Hamlets. Tikurmidir and Lemmariet are
neighboring hamlets, situated on fertile dega lands. To-
gether they occupy the southwest quadrant of Kidus
Yowhannis parish (hamlet and parish names are pseudo-
nyms), a three hour walk from the awraja seat, Dabat
town, in the Woggera region. Of the two, Tikurmidir is
larger:

	Tikurmidir	Lemmariet
[141] [592] Total population	151	95
Total households	36	24

In both hamlets, a majority of households are headed by

[613] risteñas. These households are distributed among the
[592] hamlets' ambilineages as follows:

		Tikurmidir	Lemmariet
Ambilineage	I	18	10
Ambilineage	II	6	1